





# Egmont

## A TRAGEDY

*Translated by Michael Hamburger*

### CHARACTERS

MARGARET OF PARMA, daughter of Charles V  
and Regent of the Netherlands

COUNT EGMONT, Prince of Gavre

WILLIAM OF ORANGE

DUKE OF ALBA

FERDINAND, his natural son

MACHIAVELLI, in the Regent's service

RICHARD, Egmont's private secretary

SILVA }  
GOMEZ } in Alba's service

CLARE, Egmont's mistress

HER MOTHER

BRACKENBURG, a burgess

SOEST, grocer }  
JETTER, tailor } citizens of Brussels  
CARPENTER }  
SOAPBOILER }

BUYCK, soldier under Egmont

RUYSUM, disabled soldier, hard of hearing

VANSEN, a clerk

People, attendants, guards, etc.

*The scene is Brussels.*

*The year is 1568.*

### ACT I

*Crossbow Target Shooting Soldiers and Citizens with crossbows. Jetter, citizen of Brussels, a tailor, steps forward and prepares to shoot. Soest, citizen of Brussels, a grocer.*

SOEST. Well, go ahead and shoot so there'll be an end to it. You won't beat me, anyway. Three in the black is more than you ever got in all your life. That means I'm champion for the year.

JETTER. Champion, indeed, and king as well. Who would begrudge you the honour? But you'll have to pay for two rounds; you'll have to pay for your skill as every champion does.

*Buyck, a Dutchman, soldier serving under Egmont.*

BUYCK. Jetter, I'll buy those shots off you, share the prize, pay for the gentlemen's drinks: I've been here so very long and feel indebted to them for so much courtesy. If I miss, the turn shall count as yours.

SOEST. I should really protest, for your bargain makes *me* the loser. But never mind, Buyck, shoot ahead.

BUYCK (*shoots*). Well, here goes—One, two, three, four.

SOEST. What, four in the black? You're the winner, then.

ALL. Three cheers for the king. Hip, hip, hurray, hurray, hurray.

BUYCK. Thank you, gentlemen. But even "Champion" would be too much. Thank you for the honour.

JETTER. You've yourself to thank for it.

*Ruysum, a Frisian, disabled soldier, hard of hearing.*

RUYSUM. Let me tell you!

SOEST. Tell us what, old man?

RUYSUM. Let me tell you: he shoots like his master, like Egmont.

BUYCK. Compared to him I'm only a poor bungler. You should see him on the musket range; he hits the mark like no one else in the world. I don't mean when he's lucky or in the right mood. No: every time, he's no sooner taken aim than he's got the bull's-eye. It's he who taught me. I'd like to see the fellow who's served with him and not learnt anything from him! But I haven't forgotten, gentlemen. A king looks after his people; so let's have some wine, at the king's expense.

JETTER. It was agreed between us that each of us—

BUYCK. I'm a stranger here, and king, and I pay no attention to your laws and customs.

JETTER. Why, you're worse than the Spaniards; they've had to leave our laws and customs alone, till now, anyway.

RUYSUM. What do you say?

SOEST (*loudly*). He wants to stand all the drinks; he doesn't want us to put our money together and let the king only pay double.

RUYSUM. Let him, then. But no offence. That's his master's way too—to be lavish and never leave money to burn a hole in his pocket.

*They bring wine.*

ALL. Good health, your Majesty, and a prosperous life!

JETTER, *to* BUYCK. That's right: your Majesty. You deserve the honour.

BUYCK. Well, if it must be, thank you with all my heart.

SOEST. It must be; for no true citizen of the Low Countries will easily drink the health of our Spanish Majesty—not with all his heart.

RUYSUM. Whose health, did you say?

SOEST (*loudly*). Philip the Second, King of Spain.

RUYSUM. Our most gracious King and Lord! May God grant him a long reign.

SOEST. Didn't you prefer his father of blessed memory, Charles the Fifth?

RUYSUM. God have mercy on his soul. He was a great gentleman. He had the whole earth to take care of, but he was a father and brother to us all. And if he met you in the street, he greeted you as one neighbour greets another, and if that gave you a start, he was gracious enough to—Don't misunderstand me. I mean: he went out, rode out just as the fancy took him, with only a few men. There wasn't a dry eye to be seen when he abdicated and made his son governor of these parts. Don't misunderstand me, I say. But Philip's different, you'll admit; more majestic, if you like.

JETTER. No man ever saw him, when he was here, but in royal pomp and ceremony. He doesn't talk much, people say.

SOEST. He's not the man for us of the Low Countries. Our princes must be light-hearted like ourselves, live and let live. We won't be despised or pressed, good-natured fools though we are.

JETTER. The King would be gracious enough, I think, if only he had better advisers.

SOEST. No. Never. He doesn't take to our sort, he has no sympathy for us, he doesn't love us. How, then, can we love him in our turn? Why is every single

one of us so fond of Count Egmont? Why would we gladly carry him about on our hands? Because you can see that he wishes us well; because you can read his cheerfulness, the free life he lives, the good opinion he has of us, in his eyes; because he hasn't a single possession that he wouldn't give away to a needy man, even to a man who didn't need it. Let's drink to Count Egmont! Buyck, it's your privilege to propose the first toast. Propose the health of your master!

BUYCK. With the greatest pleasure: Count Egmont.

RUYSUM. Victor at St. Quentin!

BUYCK. To the hero of Gravelingen!

ALL. To his health!

RUYSUM. St. Quentin was my last battle. I could hardly move another inch, hardly drag my heavy musket any further. And yet! I gave the Frenchman one last thing to remember me by, and got something too, though it only grazed my right leg.

BUYCK. But Gravelingen, friends, that was a pretty lively affair. There victory was ours alone. Hadn't those French dogs been burning and laying waste the whole length and breadth of Flanders? But, there's no doubt about it, we gave them what they deserved. Their old, tried soldiers held out for a long time, but we pressed and shot and slashed at them till they pulled faces and their lines began to give way. Then Egmont's horse was shot away from under him, and there was a long uncertain struggle, man to man, horse against horse, troop against troop, on the broad flat sand of the seashore. Then suddenly it came as if down from heaven, from the river mouth—the "bow, bow" of the big cannons firing right into the midst of the French. It was the English, who just happened to be passing on their way from Dunkirk under Admiral Malin. They didn't help us much, it's true; they could only get in with their smallest ships, and not close enough at that; and sometimes they shot at us by mistake. But it did us good, all the same. It broke the Frenchmen's spirit and gave us new courage. So now we made short work of them. Killed the whole lot or drove them into the water. And those fellows drowned as soon as they tasted water. As for us Dutchmen, we went in after them. Amphibians that we are, we didn't feel happy till we were in the water, like frogs, and we just went on fighting the enemy in the river, shot them down as if they were ducks. The few that got away after that—well, the peasant women saw to them: beat them down as they ran with pitchforks and pickaxes. So his French Majesty had no choice but to come to heel and make peace. So it's to us you owe that peace, to our great Egmont!

ALL. To our great Egmont! And again! And again! And yet again!

JETTER. If only he'd been appointed our Regent in Margaret of Parma's place!

SOEST. No, that's going too far. Honour where honour is due. I won't hear Margaret's name abused. Now it's my turn. Long live our gracious lady!

ALL. Long live Margaret!

SOEST. It's true, there's no denying the excellence of the women in the ruling house. Long live the Regent!

JETTER. She's clever and moderate in everything she does. If only she didn't stick to the parsons through thick and thin. It's partly her fault that we have those fourteen new bishoprics in our country. What can they be for? Only to push a lot of strangers into the best positions, where they used to put abbots elected by the chapter. And they want us to believe it's all for religion's sake. That's the root of the trouble. Three bishops were enough for us; honesty and decency were the rule in those days. Now everyone has to pretend that they're really necessary, and so there's no end to the trouble and bickering. And the more you look into the thing, the more murky it seems.

*They drink.*

SOEST. That was simply the King's will; she can do nothing about it either way.

JETTER. And now they tell us we mustn't sing those new psalms. And yet they're beautifully versified, and their tunes couldn't be more uplifting. We mustn't sing those, but as many profane and scurrilous ditties as we please. Why, do you think? They say those psalms contain heresies and goodness knows what else. And yet I've sung them before now and I couldn't see anything bad in them. It's a new idea.

BUYCK. I shouldn't dream of asking their permission. In our province we sing what we like. That's because Count Egmont is our governor; he doesn't interfere with things of that kind—in Ghent, in Ypres, in the whole of Flanders, whoever wants to, sings them.

*Loudly:*

Surely there's nothing more innocent than a spiritual song? Isn't that so, Father?

RUYSUM. Indeed. For it's a form of devotion and it purifies the heart.

JETTER. But they say it doesn't do so in the right way—not in *their* way. And it's always dangerous, so one leaves it alone. The servants of the Inquisition creep and snoop about everywhere. Many an honest man has come to grief already. To suppress our freedom of conscience—that was the last straw. If I can't do what I

please, they might at least let me think and sing what I please.

SOEST. The Inquisition won't get the better of us. We're not like the Spaniards and will never let anyone tyrannize over our conscience. And the nobility too will have to start resisting it soon.

JETTER. We're in a very awkward position. If those fine people take it into their heads to come rushing into my house, and I'm sitting down, doing my work, and just happen to be humming a French psalm, without a thought in my head, whether virtuous or wicked, but I simply hum it because the tune is there inside me—well, that makes me a heretic, and they put me in jail. Or I'm out for a walk and stop when I see a crowd of people listening to some new preacher—one of those who've come from Germany—that makes me a rebel, no less, and they'll chop off my head as likely as not. Have you ever heard one of them preach?

SOEST. Very fine preachers, if you ask me. The other day I heard one speak to thousands and thousands of people. That was a different kettle of fish—not like ours, always beating about the bush, stuffing Latin tags down the people's throats. That one made no bones about it. He told us straight how they've been leading us by the nose till now, keeping us ignorant, and how we could have more light for the asking. And he proved it all from the Bible.

JETTER. I'm sure there is something in that. I've often said so myself and pondered on those matters. It's been troubling my head for a long time.

BUYCK. I suppose that's why they're so popular.

SOEST. And no wonder. Who wouldn't go to hear something that's good and new?

JETTER. What's the matter, then? Why can't any man be allowed to preach in his own way?

BUYCK. Drink up, gentlemen. All this chatter is making you forget your wine—and William of Orange too.

JETTER. Oh, we mustn't forget him. He's a real tower of strength: you've only to think of him to feel that you can hide behind him, and the devil himself wouldn't be able to get you out. To William of Orange, then!

ALL. To his health!

SOEST. Now, old man, propose your own health too!

RUYSUM. Old soldiers! All soldiers! Long live war!

BUYCK. Well said, old man. All soldiers! Long live war!

JETTER. War, war! Do you know what you're saying? That word comes to you easily enough, and I suppose that's natural, but I can't tell you how wretched it sounds to those of my kind. To hear nothing but drumbeats the whole year

round; and hear nothing but one troop marching in here, another there; how they came over a hill and stopped by a windmill, how many were left there, how many in another place, and how they fight, and how one wins, the other loses, though for the life of me I can't understand who's won anything, who's lost. How a town is captured, the citizens murdered, and what becomes of the poor women, the innocent children. Affliction and terror, that's what it means to us, and every moment one thinks: "Look, they're coming! And they'll do the same to us."

SOEST. That's why a citizen too should always be trained to use arms.

JETTER. Yes, whoever has a wife and children learns to defend them. But I'd still rather hear about soldiers than see them.

BUYCK. I should take offence at that remark.

JETTER. It isn't aimed at you, friend. We were all relieved when we'd got rid of the Spanish occupation forces.

SOEST. Yes, indeed. You found those most irksome of all, didn't you?

JETTER. Don't try to make a fool of me.

SOEST. They were sorry to leave your house.

JETTER. Shut your mouth.

SOEST. They'd driven him out of his kitchen, his cellar, his sitting-room—and his bed.

*Laughter.*

JETTER. You're a fool.

BUYCK. Peace, gentlemen! Do you need a soldier to make peace between you? Well, since you don't want to have anything to do with our sort, you'd better propose a toast to yourselves, a civil toast.

JETTER. That we'll do gladly. Security and quiet!

SOEST. Order and freedom!

BUYCK. Bravo! That suits us too.

*They clink glasses and cheerfully repeat these words, but in such a way that each calls out a different word and a kind of canon results. The old man listens and finally joins in also.*

ALL. Security and quiet! Order and freedom!

*The Regent's Palace Margaret of Parma in hunting attire. Courtiers. Pages.*



*Servants.*

REGENT. You will cancel the hunt; I shall not ride today. Tell Machiavelli to come to me.

*Exeunt all.*

The thought of these terrible happenings gives me no peace. Nothing pleases me, nothing distracts me; always these misgivings, these cares torment me. The King will say that these are the fruits of my kindness, my consideration; and yet my conscience tells me that at every moment I did what was most advisable, that my only purpose was to do the right thing at the right time. Should I, then, have fanned these flames even sooner and made them spread, by exposing them to a tempest of wrath? It was my hope to set limits to their progress and stifle them by driving them back upon themselves. I know that this is the truth and by reminding myself of it I can absolve myself from all self-reproach. But how will my brother receive the news? For there is no denying it: the insolence of the new preachers has been growing daily. They have blasphemed against our most sacred tenets, subverted the dull minds of the common people, and released the spirit of confusion in their midst. Arrant rogues have joined the ranks of the insurgents and caused dreadful atrocities to be committed. Only to think of them makes me shudder, and now I must report them one by one to the Court, one by one and speedily, so that the general rumour will not forestall our account, so that the King will not suspect us of trying to conceal the rest. I can see no means, whether stern or gentle, of opposing this evil. Oh, what are we, then, the great on the crest of humanity's wave? We think that we rule its fury, but it bears us up and down, to and fro.

*Enter Machiavelli.*

REGENT. Have those letters to the King been drafted?

MACHIAVELLI. They will be ready for your signature in an hour's time.

REGENT. Have you made the report sufficiently detailed?

MACHIAVELLI. Detailed and elaborate, as the King likes them to be. I recount how the iconoclastic fury first broke out at St. Omer. How a raging mob, furnished with staves, axes, hammers, ladders, and ropes, accompanied by a few armed men, began by attacking chapels, churches, and monasteries, driving out the worshippers, breaking open the doors, throwing everything into disorder, tearing



down the altars, breaking the statues of saints, destroying every painting, shattering, ripping up, stamping to pieces every consecrated and holy thing they could lay hands upon. How this rabble grew in numbers as it proceeded, how the inhabitants of Ypres opened the gates to them. How they laid waste the cathedral there with incredible speed, how they burnt the bishop's library. How a great mob of common folk, seized with the same frenzy, poured into Menin, Comines, Verwich, Lille, encountered no resistance anywhere, and how, in the twinkling of an eye, the conspiracy declared itself and struck almost throughout the whole of Flanders.

REGENT. Oh, the repetition of it renews my pain. And now there is the added fear that the evil will only grow and grow. Tell me what you think, Machiavelli?

MACHIAVELLI. Forgive me, your Highness, if my thoughts are more like whims; and though you have always been satisfied with my services, you have rarely chosen to take my advice. Often you have said in jest: "You're too farsighted, Machiavelli! You should be a historian: the man who acts should keep his eyes on what is nearest to him." And yet, didn't I predict this whole story? Did I not foresee it all?

REGENT. I too foresee a great deal without having the power to forestall it.

MACHIAVELLI. Briefly, then, and to the point: you will not suppress the new doctrine. Let them have their way but separate them from the orthodox. Give them churches, integrate them in the framework of society, restrict their influence: then you will have silenced the rebels at a single stroke. Every other measure will be in vain, and you will lay waste the country.

REGENT. Have you forgotten with what repugnance my brother condemned the very suggestion that the new doctrine might be tolerated? Don't you know how in every letter he reminds me most emphatically of my duty to maintain the true faith? That he will not hear of a peace and a unity established at the expense of religion? Even in the Provinces does he not keep spies unknown to us, so as to observe who is likely to go over to the new creed? Did he not amaze us by naming more than one person close to us who has become guilty of heresy, though in secret? Does he not command us to practise severity and ruthless justice? And you want me to be merciful? To make proposals to him that call on him to be considerate and tolerant? Should I not lose all his confidence, all his trust?

MACHIAVELLI. Well I know it; the King gives orders, he lets you know his intentions. You are to establish peace and quiet once more by a measure that will only increase the general embitterment, that will inevitably fan the fires of



war from every direction. Consider what you are doing. The most powerful merchants have been infected, the nobility, the people, the soldiers. What is the use of adhering to his ideas, when everything around us is changing? If only some benevolent spirit would make it clear to Philip that it is more fitting for a king to rule citizens of two different creeds than to incite one party against the other.

REGENT. I forbid you to speak in that way. I know very well that in politics one can rarely keep faith or troth, but must ban frankness, kindness, and indulgence from one's heart. In worldly affairs that is only too true, but are we to toy with God, as we toy with one another? Are we to be indifferent to our proven doctrine, for which so many have offered up their lives? Should we yield even that to an upstart, uncertain, and self-contradictory fad?

MACHIAVELLI. Please don't think ill of me on that account.

REGENT. I know you to be a loyal servant, and I know that a man can be honest and prudent even though he has missed the nearest, straightest way to his soul's salvation. You are not the only one, Machiavelli, not the only man whom I must both respect and reproach.

MACHIAVELLI. To whom are you alluding?

REGENT. I will confess to you that Egmont aroused my deep and acute displeasure today.

MACHIAVELLI. By what kind of conduct?

REGENT. By his usual conduct, by his nonchalance and recklessness. I received the terrible news just as I was coming out of church in his and many others' company. I could not contain my grief, voiced my complaint and, turning to him, cried out: "Look what is happening in your province! And you put up with it, Count, you of whom the King expected so much?"

MACHIAVELLI. And what did he reply?

REGENT. As if it were nothing, a mere irrelevance, he retorted: "If only the people of the Netherlands were assured that the Constitution is safe, the rest could easily be settled."

MACHIAVELLI. Perhaps he spoke with more truth than prudence or piety. How can confidence be established and preserved when the people of the Netherlands see that we are more concerned with their possessions than with their well-being or the good of their souls? Have the new bishops saved more souls than they've swallowed rich benefices, and are not most of them foreigners? Still all the town governorships are held by Netherlanders: do the Spaniards trouble to conceal their irresistible covetousness for these places? Does not a people prefer to be



ruled by its own kind, in its own fashion, rather than by strangers who begin by endeavouring to acquire property in the country at everyone's expense, who apply strange standards, and who rule harshly and without sympathy?

REGENT. You are placing yourself on the opposing side.

MACHIAVELLI. Not in my heart, certainly, and I wish that my head could be wholly on ours.

REGENT. If that is your view, it would be necessary for me to abdicate from the Regency; for Egmont and Orange once lived in high hopes of occupying that place. At that time they were rivals; now they are in league against me and have become friends, inseparable friends.

MACHIAVELLI. A dangerous couple!

REGENT. To be frank, I fear Orange, and I fear for Egmont. Orange is up to no good, his thoughts reach out to the distant future, he is secretive, seems to accept everything, never contradicts, and with the deepest reverence, with the greatest caution, he does what he pleases.

MACHIAVELLI. Quite the contrary of Egmont, who walks about as freely as if the world belonged to him.

REGENT. He wears his head as high as if the hand of Majesty were not suspended over it.

MACHIAVELLI. The people's eyes are all fixed on him, and all their hearts.

REGENT. He has never troubled about appearances—as if there were no one to call him to account. Still he bears the name of Egmont; is glad to hear himself called “Count Egmont,” as if loath to forget that his ancestors were the lords of Geldern. Why doesn't he call himself Prince of Gavre, as he is entitled to? Why does he do it? Does he want to re-establish obsolete rights?

MACHIAVELLI. I look upon him as a loyal servant of the King.

REGENT. If he only wanted to, what indispensable services he could render the Government, instead of causing us endless annoyance without any profit to himself, as he's already done! His receptions, banquets, and carousals have done more to unify the nobility than the most dangerous secret conferences. From his toasts the guests have drawn a lasting intoxication, a chronic giddiness. How often his jests and jibes have stirred up the people's minds, and how the populace gaped at his new liveries, at the foolish badges of his servants!

MACHIAVELLI. I'm sure this was not his intention.

REGENT. So much the worse for us all. As I was saying: he harms us and does himself no good. He turns serious things into a joke, and we, so as not to appear idle and careless, must take his jokes seriously. So one worries the other, and



what we try to avert is all the more certain to occur. He is more dangerous than the declared head of a conspiracy, and I should be very much surprised if at Court they don't keep a record of all his misdeeds. There's no denying it: hardly a week passes without his causing me grave discomfort, the very gravest discomfort.

MACHIAVELLI. It seems to me that in all things he acts according to his conscience.

REGENT. His conscience has a flattering mirror; his conduct is often offensive.

Often he looks as if he were firmly convinced that he is really our master, though out of kindness he's obliging enough not to make us feel it, to refrain from simply driving us out of the country—with the assumption that we'll go in any case, all in good time.

MACHIAVELLI. I beg of you, don't put such a dangerous construction upon his frankness, his happy disposition, that takes important things lightly. You will only harm him and yourself.

REGENT. I put no construction on anything. I am merely speaking of the inevitable consequences and I know him well. His Netherlandish nobility and the Order of the Golden Fleece strengthen his confidence, his boldness. Both can guard him against the King's sudden, arbitrary displeasure. Just examine the matter precisely and you must agree that he alone is responsible for all the misfortunes that have descended on Flanders. He was the first to tolerate the new teachers, easy-going as he is, and perhaps secretly pleased that they gave us something to reckon with. No, don't interrupt me: I am taking the opportunity to tell you all that is on my mind. And I don't wish to discharge my arrows in vain; I know where he is vulnerable. Yes, Egmont too is vulnerable.

MACHIAVELLI. Have you summoned the Council? Is Orange coming too?

REGENT. I've sent to Antwerp for him. I propose to move the burden of responsibility very close to them; they must join me in seriously resisting the evil or else declare themselves rebels. Lose no time in finishing the letters and bring them to me for signature! Then quickly send off the experienced Vasca to Madrid—he is indefatigable and loyal—so that he shall be the first to convey the news to my brother, so that the rumour will not precede him. I will speak to him myself before he leaves.

MACHIAVELLI. Your commands will be executed both speedily and exactly.

*Citizen's House Clare. Clare's Mother. Brackenburg.*

CLARE. Won't you hold the thread for me, Brackenburg?



BRACKENBURG. I beg you to spare me, my dear.

CLARE. What's the matter with you tonight? Why do you refuse me this little attention?

BRACKENBURG. Your thread keeps me so spell-bound that I can't avoid your eyes.

CLARE. Nonsense! Come and hold it!

MOTHER (*knitting in her arm-chair*). Why don't you sing? Brackenburg makes such a good second. You used to be so cheerful, both of you, and I never stopped laughing at your pranks.

BRACKENBURG. We used to be.

CLARE. Let's sing, then.

BRACKENBURG. Whatever you wish.

CLARE. Well, then, sing up; and make it lively. It's a military song and my favourite.

*She winds the thread and sings with Brackenburg.*

Strike up! To your drumming!  
And blow the fife loud.  
My sweetheart in armour  
Commands the whole crowd.  
His lance held aloft rules  
Their going and coming.  
Now faster my blood flows  
My heart goes pit-pat.  
O, would I wore doublet  
And breeches and hat!

Then marching I'd follow  
Him out through the gate  
And roam with him fighting  
Through province and state.  
Our enemy's fleeing.  
We shoot them as they run!  
There's nothing like being  
A man with a gun!

*As they sing Brackenburg looks at Clare repeatedly; at the end his voice fails him, tears come into his eyes, he drops the thread, and goes to the window.*



*Clare finishes the song by herself, her mother signals to her half-angrily, Clare rises, takes a few steps towards him, turns back irresolutely, and sits down.*

MOTHER. What's going on outside, Brackenburg? I hear the sound of marching.

BRACKENBURG. It's the Regent's Life Guards.

CLARE. At this hour? What's the meaning of that?

*She gets up and goes to the window with Brackenburg.*

That's not the ordinary guard, there are many more of them, nearly the whole regiment. Oh, Brackenburg, do go and find out what's happening. It must be something special. Please go, my dear. Do me this favour!

BRACKENBURG. I'm going. I shall be with you again in a moment.

*He holds out his hand to her as he leaves; she clasps it.*

MOTHER. There you go again, sending him off!

CLARE. I'm curious; and besides—don't be angry with me—his presence pains me.

I never know how to behave towards him. I'm in the wrong where he's concerned, and it grieves me to see him suffer so much because of it. When there's nothing I can do about it.

MOTHER. He's such a loyal fellow.

CLARE. That's why I can't help being kind to him. Often my hand seems to close of its own accord when his hand touches me in that tender, loving way. I reproach myself for deceiving him, for keeping a vain hope alive in his heart. I'm in a terrible quandary. God knows I'm not deceiving him. I don't want him to hope and yet I can't let him despair.

MOTHER. That's not right of you.

CLARE. I used to be fond of him and still wish him well with all my soul. I could have married him, and yet I think I was never in love with him.

MOTHER. But you would have been happy with him if you had.

CLARE. I'd have been well provided for and led a quiet life.

MOTHER. And you've lost all that through your own fault.

CLARE. I'm in a very strange position. When I ask myself how it came about, I know the answer and I don't know it. And then I've only to look at Egmont again to understand everything that's happened—and *more* than what's happened. What a man! All the Provinces idolize him; so how could I help being the happiest creature in the world when he holds me in his arms?



MOTHER. But what will become of us? What of the future?

CLARE. Oh, all I ask is whether he loves me; and would you call that a question?

MOTHER. Distress and anxiety, that's all one gets from one's children. How will it end, I ask you? Worry and grief all the time. No good will come of it. You've made yourself unhappy and made me unhappy.

CLARE (*nonchalantly*). You raised no objection at first.

MOTHER. Unfortunately not. I was too kind, too easy-going. I always am.

CLARE. When Egmont rode past and I went to the window, did you tell me off? Didn't you go to the window too? When he looked up, smiled, nodded, and called to me: did you mind? Didn't you feel that he honoured you by honouring your daughter?

MOTHER. Now you're reproaching me!

CLARE (*moved*). And then when he came more often to our street and it was clear to us that he came this way because of me, weren't you pleased in secret? Did you call me away when I stood behind the panes, waiting for him?

MOTHER. Could I know that it would go so far?

CLARE (*in a halting voice, restraining her tears*). And when he surprised us in the evening, wrapped in his cloak, and we were working by lamplight, who was it that hurried to receive him, since I remained seated, amazed, and glued to the chair?

MOTHER. And had I any reason to fear that this unhappy love would knock my clever little Clare off her feet and so quickly too? Now I have to accept the fact that my daughter——

CLARE (*breaking into tears*). Mother! There's no need to put it like that. Anyone would think you enjoy frightening me.

MOTHER (*weeping*). Yes, go on and cry on top of everything! Make me even more miserable by being sad! Isn't it bad enough that my only daughter is a fallen creature?

CLARE (*rising coldly*). Fallen? Egmont's mistress a fallen creature? There isn't a duchess who wouldn't envy little Clare her place in his heart. Oh, Mother, you've never used such words till now. Be patient with me, dear.... Leave other people to think *that* of me, leave the neighbours to whisper what they please. This room, this little house have been heaven to me since Egmont's love first crossed the threshold.

MOTHER. Well, it's true one can't help liking him. He's always so amiable and frank and easy.

CLARE. There's no strain of falsehood in him at all. And yet, Mother, he's the great



Egmont. And when he comes to see me, he's all kindness and goodness. Why he even does his best to conceal his rank and his courage, he's so concerned about me. Here he's simply a man, a friend, and my dearest love.

MOTHER. Do you think he will come today?

CLARE. Didn't you notice how often I've been to the window? Didn't you notice how I listen when there's a noise at the door? Though I know that he won't come before nightfall, I still expect him every moment from the instant I get up in the morning. If only I were a boy and could go about with him all the time, to Court and everywhere! If only I could carry his standard for him in battle!

MOTHER. You've always been a sort of tomboy, even when you were a small child, now wild, now pensive. Don't you think you should put on something a little better?

CLARE. Maybe, Mother—if I feel bored. You know, yesterday some of his men passed by, singing songs in his praise. At least his name was part of the songs; I couldn't catch the rest. I could feel my heartbeats right up in my throat. I should have liked to call them back, if I hadn't been afraid of drawing attention to myself.

MOTHER. You be careful! Or your impulsive nature will spoil everything. You'll give yourself away. Just as you did the other day at your cousin's, when you found that woodcut and the inscription and exclaimed with a cry: "Count Egmont!" I turned crimson with shame.

CLARE. How could I not cry out? It was the battle of Gravelingen, and I found the letter C at the top of the picture, so I looked for C in the description. There I read: "Count Egmont, when his horse was shot dead under him." I felt my blood rise—and later I had to laugh at the woodcut Egmont, who was as tall as the tower of Gravelingen just next to him and the English ships on one side. What a strange idea I used to have of what a battle is like and what Count Egmont himself is like, when I was a girl, when they told stories about him, and of every Count and Duke—and how different they all seem now!

*Re-enter Brackenburg.*

CLARE. What's happening?

BRACKENBURG. No one is sure. They say that a new riot has broken out in Flanders, that the Regent is afraid it may spread to our parts. The Palace Guard has been strongly reinforced, there are crowds of citizens at the gates, the streets are full of people.... I think I should call on my old father.



*As if about to leave.*

CLARE. Shall we see you tomorrow? I'm just going to dress. We're expecting my cousin, and I look too slovenly for words. Will you help me, Mother? Take that book, Brackenburg, and bring me another of those histories!

MOTHER. Good-bye.

BRACKENBURG (*holding out his hand*). Won't you give me your hand?

CLARE (*refusing the hand*). When you come again.

*Exeunt mother and daughter.*

BRACKENBURG (*alone*). I had intended to leave at once, and now that she accepts the gesture and lets me go, I can hardly bear it. Oh, what a wretch I am! Not even moved by the fate of my country, the growing unrest. My own kind or the Spaniards, it's all the same to me, who's in power and who's in the right. How very different I was when I was a schoolboy! When they set us a piece called "Brutus's Speech on Liberty, an Exercise in Oratory," it was always Fritz who came first, and the headmaster said: "If only it were more tidy, not such a jumble of enthusiasms." I was all drive and ferment then! Now I drag myself along, hanging on that girl's eyes. Since I can't leave her alone, and she can't love me. Oh, she can't have rejected me entirely—can't have, yes or no, but half her love is no love. I'll not put up with it a moment longer! ... Could it be true, then, what a friend whispered in my ear the other day? That she secretly receives a man at night, since she always drives me out so respectably before the evening? No, it's not true, it's a lie, a shameful, slanderous lie! Clare is as innocent as I'm unhappy. She's rejected me, cast me out of her heart. And can I go on like that? I'll not put up with it.... Already my country is divided against itself—more violently each—and I simply languish away in the midst of all that turmoil! No, I'll not put up with it. When the bugle sounds, when a shot rings out it pierces me to the marrow. Yet it doesn't provoke me, doesn't challenge me to enter the fray, to save and dare with the rest.... Oh, wretched, despicable state. Better to put an end to it once and for all. Already once I threw myself into the water and sank—but my terrified nature was stronger. I felt that I could swim and reluctantly saved myself.... If only I could forget the time when she loved me or seemed to love me! ... Why did that happiness pervade every bone of my body? Why have these hopes deprived me of all pleasure in life by showing me a paradise from afar? And that first kiss, the only one! Here (*resting his head on the table*) at this very place we were alone together—she had always been kind



and pleasant to me—then she seemed to soften, she looked at me, all my senses were in a whirl, and I felt her lips on mine. And now? There's only death. Why do I hesitate?

*He takes a small bottle out of his pocket.*

This time it must not be in vain; not in vain that I stole this poison out of my brother's medicine chest. It shall rid me once and for all of this anguish, this uncertainty, this fever worse than death.

## ACT II

*Square in Brussels Jetter and a Carpenter meet.*

CARPENTER. Didn't I predict it? Only a week ago, at the Guild meeting, I said there would be serious clashes.

JETTER. Is it true, then, that they've robbed the churches in Flanders?

CARPENTER. Plundered them, ruined them completely, both churches and chapels. Left nothing but the four bare walls. A lot of hooligans, every one of them. And that put a bad face on our good cause. We should rather have pleaded our just cause to the Regent in an orderly and firm manner and insisted on it. If we make speeches now or meet, they accuse us of joining the rebels.

JETTER. Yes. And so everyone thinks: why should I stick out my face—since my neck is all too close to it?

CARPENTER. I feel very uncomfortable, now that this turmoil has taken possession of the mob, the people who have nothing to lose. They make a mere pretext of what we too profess and will plunge our country into misfortune.

*Soest joins them.*

SOEST. Good morning, gentlemen. What's the news? Is it true that the iconoclasts are on their way here?

CARPENTER. They'd better keep their hands off here.

SOEST. A soldier came into my shop to buy tobacco. I questioned him. The Regent, clever, brave woman though she remains, has lost her head this time. Things must be very bad for her to hide like this behind her Guard. The Palace Guard has been heavily reinforced. It's even rumoured that she intends to flee from the town.



CARPENTER. She mustn't leave. Her presence protects us, and we shall give her more security than her clipped beards. And if she maintains our rights and liberties, we shall carry her aloft.

*Soapboiler joins them.*

SOAPBOILER. A nasty, filthy roughhouse! There's more and more trouble, and it will come to a bad end.... Be careful, now, and keep quiet, so that they won't take you for rebel agents.

SOEST. Look! There are the seven sages from Greece!

SOAPBOILER. I know there are many who secretly support the Calvinists, slander the bishops, and have no respect for the King. But a loyal subject, a true Catholic

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*One by one various people join them, listening. Vansen joins them.*

VANSEN. Greetings, gentlemen! What's been happening?

CARPENTER. Have nothing to do with that one. He's a scoundrel.

JETTER. Isn't he Dr. Wiet's clerk?

CARPENTER. He's had a good many masters. First he was a clerk and, when one employer after another had kicked him out for his knaveries, he began to botch the briefs of solicitors and barristers, and he's too fond of the brandy bottle.

*More and more people gather and stand about in groups.*

VANSEN. Why, you've got quite a crowd collected here and, what's more, you're putting your heads together. Quite an interesting occasion.

SOEST. I think so too.

VANSEN. Now, if one or the other of you had the heart, and one or the other had the head as well, we could break the Spanish chains with one blow.

SOEST. Sir, you must not speak like that! We have sworn loyalty to the King.

VANSEN. And the King to us! Don't forget that!

JETTER. Very true! Tell us your views!

SOME OTHERS. Listen to him! He knows what he's talking about.

VANSEN. I had an old employer once, who owned documents and letters about the most ancient decrees, contracts, and laws. He collected the rarest books. In one of them our whole constitution was set out: how we Netherlanders were ruled at first by single princes, all according to traditional rights, privileges, and customs;



how our ancestors had every kind of respect for their Prince, as long as he ruled them as he must; and how they sat up as soon as he looked like being too big for his boots. Our deputies were after him at once; for every Province, however small, had its parliament and deputies.

CARPENTER. Shut your mouth! We've known all that for a long time. Every decent citizen knows as much about the constitution as he needs to know.

JETTER. Let him speak; there's always something new to be learnt.

SOEST. He's quite right.

SEVERAL OTHERS. Go on, tell us more. We don't hear that kind of thing every day.

VANSEN. That's what you're like, citizens. You just drift along from day to day and, just as you took over your trades from your parents, you let the government rule you as it pleases. You ask no questions about tradition, about history, about the rights of a Regent; and because you have failed in that, the Spaniards have pulled tight the net right over your heads.

SOEST. Who worries about that? If only a man has enough to eat.

JETTER. Damnation! Why didn't somebody get up in time and tell us these things?

VANSEN. I'm telling you now. The King in Spain, who happens to own all our provinces, has no right, all the same, to rule them any differently from the little princes who once owned them separately. Do you understand that?

JETTER. Explain it to us.

VANSEN. It's as clear as daylight. Should you not be judged according to the laws of your country? How could it be otherwise?

A CITIZEN. True enough!

VANSEN. Hasn't the citizen of Brussels other laws than the citizen of Antwerp? And the citizen of Antwerp than the citizen of Ghent? How could it be otherwise?

OTHER CITIZENS. By God, it's true.

VANSEN. But if you let things go on as they are, they'll soon show you a very different picture. Shame on it! What Charles the Bold, Frederick the Warrior, Charles V could not do, Philip does through a woman!

SOEST. Indeed. The old princes too tried to get away with it.

VANSEN. Naturally.... Our ancestors were on their guard. When they had a grudge against one of their masters, they would capture his son and heir, keep him prisoner, and only release him when all their conditions had been met—or something of that kind. Our ancestors were real men! They knew what was good for them. They knew how to get hold of things and keep them. Real men, I say. And that's why our privileges are so clearly outlined, our liberties so securely guarded.



SOAPBOILER. What's that you're saying about our liberties?

THE CROWD. Yes, our liberties, our privileges! Tell us more about our privileges!

VANSEN. We men of Brabant especially, though all Provinces have their advantages, we have the most splendid rights. I've read about them all.

SOEST. Tell us what they are.

JETTER. Let's have them all.

A CITIZEN. I beg you.

VANSEN. Firstly, it is written: The Duke of Brabant shall be a good and loyal master to us.

SOEST. Good, was that the word? Is that what it says?

JETTER. Loyal? Is that so?

VANSEN. That's what I'm telling you. He's bound to us by oath, as we are to him. Secondly: he must not impose on us, make felt, or propose to apply to us any power or expression of his will in whatever manner.

JETTER. Excellent. Must not impose on us.

SOEST. Not make felt.

ANOTHER. And propose to apply. That's the crux of it. Apply to no one, in whatever manner.

VANSEN. Most emphatically.

JETTER. Bring in the book.

A CITIZEN. Yes, we must see it.

OTHERS. The book, the book!

ANOTHER. Let's go to the Regent and show her the book.

ANOTHER. And you, Doctor, shall be our spokesman.

SOAPBOILER. Oh, the poor fools!

OTHERS. Give us another extract from the book.

SOAPBOILER. Another word out of him, and I'll make him swallow his teeth!

THE CROWD. Just let anyone try to do that! Tell us more about the privileges! Haven't we any more privileges?

VANSEN. Quite a number, friends, and very good and wholesome ones they are. It is written there too: The ruler must neither improve nor increase the status of the clergy without the consent of the nobles and the commons. Mark that, my friends! Nor alter the constitution of the Province in any way.

SOEST. Is that so?

VANSEN. I'll show it to you in writing, as set down two, three centuries ago.

CITIZENS. And we put up with the new bishops? The nobles must protect us, we must make trouble at once.



OTHERS. And we allow the Inquisition to terrorize us?

VANSEN. That's your fault.

THE PEOPLE. We still have Egmont! And Orange! They will see to it.

VANSEN. Your brothers in Flanders have begun the good work.

SOAPBOILER. You rat!

*He hits him.*

OTHERS (*resist and cry out*). Are you a Spaniard too?

ANOTHER. What? Strike that honourable gentleman?

ANOTHER. Strike a man of such erudition?

*They fall upon the Soapboiler.*

CARPENTER. For heaven's sake, stop it.

*Others join in the brawl.*

Citizens! Are you out of your senses?

*Boys whistle, throw stones, incite dogs to attack. Citizens stand and gape, new people arrive, others walk about calmly, others again play all sorts of clownish tricks, shriek, and cheer.*

OTHERS. Freedom and privileges! Privileges and freedom!

*Enter Egmont with retinue.*

EGMONT. Steady, steady now, all of you. What's going on? Silence! Separate them!

CARPENTER. Your lordship, you come like an angel from heaven. Quiet, all of you!

Can't you see it's Count Egmont? Pay your respects to Count Egmont!

EGMONT. You here too? What do you think you are doing? Citizen against citizen.

Doesn't even the proximity of our royal Regent restrain you from this folly? Disperse, all of you. Go back to your work. It's a bad sign when you start celebrating on working days. What was it all about?

*The tumult dies down gradually, they all surround Egmont.*

CARPENTER. They're brawling for their privileges.



EGMONT. Which they will recklessly destroy in the end. And who are you? You seem honest people to me.

CARPENTER. That is our endeavour.

EGMONT. Your trades?

CARPENTER. Carpenter, and master of the Guild.

EGMONT. And you?

SOEST. Grocer.

EGMONT. You?

JETTER. Tailor?

EGMONT. I remember, you worked at the liveries of my men. Your name is Jetter.

JETTER. It is gracious of you to recall it.

EGMONT. I don't easily forget anyone I have seen and spoken to.... Now do what you can to restore order, all of you, and to maintain it. Your position is awkward enough as it is. Do not provoke the King even more, for it is he who is in power, and will show it too. A decent citizen, who earns an honest and industrious living, will always have as much freedom as he needs.

CARPENTER. Very true, sir. And that's the rub. The pickpockets, the drunkards, the idlers, by your lordship's leave, those are the ones who make trouble out of boredom and root for privileges out of hunger, and tell lies to the inquisitive and credulous, and start brawls for the sake of a tankard of beer that someone will stand them, though many thousands will suffer because of it. That's just what they want. We keep our houses and cupboards too well locked, so they'd like to drive us out with fire-brands.

EGMONT. You can rely on every kind of help. Measures have been taken to resist this evil in the most effective way. Stand fast against the alien doctrine, and never think that privileges can be secured by riots. Stay at home. Do not allow them to create disturbances in the streets. A few sensible people can do much.

*Meanwhile the great crowd has dispersed.*

CARPENTER. Thank you, Your Excellency, thank you for your good opinion of us. We shall do all we can.

*Exit Egmont.*

A gracious gentleman! A true Netherlander! Nothing Spanish about him.

JETTER. If only he were our Regent! It would be a pleasure to obey him.

SOEST. The King takes good care to prevent that. He always puts one of his people



in that place.

JETTER. Did you notice his dress? It was in the latest fashion, the Spanish cut.

CARPENTER. A handsome gentleman.

JETTER. His neck would be a real feast to the executioner.

SOEST. Are you mad? What's got into your head?

JETTER. Yes, it's silly enough, the things that get into one's head. It's just what I happen to feel. When I see a fine, long neck, I can't help thinking at once: that's a good one for the axe.... All these cursed executions! One can't get them out of one's mind. When the young fellows go swimming and I see a bare back, at once I remember dozens that I've seen lashed by the cat-o'-nine-tails. If I meet a really fat paunch I can already see it roast on the stake. At night in my dreams I feel pinches in all my limbs. It's simply that one can't be carefree for one hour. Every sort of pleasure or jollity is soon forgotten; but the horrible apparitions might be branded on my forehead, they never leave me alone.

*Egmont's House Secretary at a table covered with papers; he rises restlessly.*

SECRETARY. He still doesn't come, and I've been waiting these two hours pen in hand, papers in front of me; and it's the very day when I want to leave early. My feet itch to be gone; I can hardly bear the delay. "Be there on the stroke of the clock," he commanded before he went out. And now he doesn't come. There's so much to be done, I shan't be finished before midnight. True, he's quite capable of closing an eye. But I should still prefer him to be strict and then let me go at the proper time. One could arrange things in that case. It's two whole hours since he left the Regent; I wonder who it is he's button-holed on the way.

*Enter Egmont.*

EGMONT. Well, how is it?

SECRETARY. I am ready, and three messengers are waiting.

EGMONT. It seems I was out too long for your liking—to judge by the face you're making.

SECRETARY. I have been waiting for some considerable time to execute your orders. Here are the papers!

EGMONT. Donna Elvira will be angry with me when she hears that I've kept you.

SECRETARY. You are joking.

EGMONT. No, my dear fellow. There's no need to feel ashamed. You have shown the best taste. She's pretty enough, and I'm very glad that you have a lady friend



in the Palace. What do the dispatches say?

SECRETARY. All kinds of things, but little that is pleasing.

EGMONT. In that case it's a good thing that we have no lack of pleasantness in our own house and needn't wait for it to come to us from outside. Are there many letters?

SECRETARY. Quite enough, and three messengers are waiting.

EGMONT. Tell me, then! Only what's essential.

SECRETARY. It's all essential.

EGMONT. One thing after another, then, but be quick about it.

SECRETARY. Captain Breda sends a report on the latest occurrences in Ghent and the surrounding district. Things are more quiet there, on the whole.

EGMONT. I suppose he mentions certain isolated cases of insolence and insubordination?

SECRETARY. Yes, there are incidents of that sort.

EGMONT. Well, spare me the particulars.

SECRETARY. They've arrested six more persons who tore down the statue of Our Lady at Verwich. He asks whether they are to be hanged like the others.

EGMONT. I'm tired of hangings. Let them be soundly whipped and released.

SECRETARY. There are two women among them. Are they to be whipped as well?

EGMONT. As for them, he is to let them off with a warning.

SECRETARY. Brink, of Breda's company, wants to marry. The captain hopes you will forbid it. There are so many women hanging around the regiment, he writes, that when we're on the march it looks less like a body of soldiers than a troop of gipsies.

EGMONT. Let it pass in Brink's case. He's a fine young fellow. He begged me most urgently before I left. But after him no one is to receive permission, much as it grieves me to refuse the poor devils their best amusement—and they've troubles enough as it is.

SECRETARY. Two of your men, Seter and Hart, have behaved abominably towards a girl, an innkeeper's daughter. They caught her when she was alone, and the girl had no means of defending herself.

EGMONT. If she's an honest girl, and they used force, they are to be birched for three days in succession, and if they have any possessions, Captain Breda is to confiscate enough of them to make provision for the girl.

SECRETARY. One of the foreign preachers entered Comines in secret, and was apprehended. He swears that he was on his way to France. According to orders he is to be beheaded.



EGMONT. They are to take him to the frontier quietly and assure him that he won't get away with it a second time.

SECRETARY. A dispatch from your Receiver-General. He writes that too little money is coming in, that he can hardly send the required sum within a week, that the disturbances have thrown everything into the greatest disorder.

EGMONT. The money must be sent. Let him find it how and where he can.

SECRETARY. He says he will do his best and will at last take action against Raymond, who has been your debtor for so long, and have him arrested.

EGMONT. But Raymond has promised to repay the money.

SECRETARY. Last time he gave himself a fortnight to do so.

EGMONT. Well, let him have another fortnight; after that they may go ahead and sue him.

SECRETARY. You are right. It's not incapacity, but ill will on his part. He will certainly take notice as soon as he sees that you're in earnest.... The Receiver-General goes on to say that he proposes to withhold half a month's pay from the old soldiers, widows, and some others to whom you have granted pensions. That would give him time to make arrangements, and they would have to manage as best they can.

EGMONT. How does he think they will manage? Those people need the money more than I do. He will refrain from withholding the pensions.

SECRETARY. What are your orders then? Where is he to obtain the funds?

EGMONT. That's his business, and I told him so in my previous dispatch.

SECRETARY. That's why he makes these proposals.

EGMONT. They are not good enough. He must think of other measures. He is to make other proposals, acceptable ones, and above all, he must find the money.

SECRETARY. I have left Count Oliva's letter here for you once more. Forgive me for drawing your attention to it again. More than anyone, the old gentleman deserves a full reply. It was your wish to write to him in person. Without doubt, he loves you like a father.

EGMONT. I haven't the time. And of all odious things, writing is the most odious to me. You're so good at imitating my handwriting, write it in my name. I'm expecting Orange. I haven't the time—and I would like his doubts to be answered by something truly comforting.

SECRETARY. Only tell me roughly what you think; I can then draft the reply and submit it to you. It shall be penned in such a way that it could pass for your handwriting in a court of law.

EGMONT. Give me the letter.



*After glancing at it:*

The dear, honest old man! I wonder were you as cautious as that when you were young? Did you never climb a fortress wall? In battle, did you remain at the back, as prudence demands? The loyal, solicitous old man! He wants me to live and be happy and does not feel that to live for safety's sake is to be dead already. Tell him not to be anxious; I shall act as I must and shall know how to protect myself. Let him use his influence at Court in my favour and be assured of my wholehearted gratitude.

SECRETARY. Is that all? He expects a great deal more.

EGMONT. What more should I say? If you want to be more long-winded, be so by all means. The crux is always the same: they want me to live in a way that is not my way. It's my good fortune to be cheerful, to take life easy, to travel light and fast, and I will not exchange these for the security of a tomb. It happens that I haven't a drop of blood in my veins that accords with the Spanish way of life; nor any desire to adapt my gait to the measured courtly cadence. Do I live only to take thought for my life? Should I forbid myself to enjoy the present moment, so as to be certain of the next? And consume the next moment too with cares and apprehensions?

SECRETARY. I beg you, sir, don't be so hard on the good gentleman. You are kind to everyone else. Only tell me a few agreeable words that will calm your noble friend. You see how careful he is, how delicately he touches you.

EGMONT. And yet he always touches this same string. He has long known how I hate these incessant admonitions. They serve only to unnerve me, never to help. And if I were a sleepwalker, balanced on the knife-edge of a roof top, would it be a friendly act to call out my name to warn me, wake me, and kill me? Let every man go his own way and look after himself.

SECRETARY. It is fitting for you not to be worried. But someone who knows and loves you——

EGMONT (*reading the letter*). There he goes again, repeating the old tales of what we did and said one evening in the easy expansiveness of sociability and wine! And of all the consequences and proofs drawn and dragged from them the whole length and breadth of the kingdom. Very well, we had cap and bells embroidered on the arms of our servants, and later had this badge of folly changed to a sheaf of arrows—an even more dangerous symbol to all those who looked for significance where there was none. There was this folly and that, conceived and born within a single moment of merriment; we were responsible



for sending off a most noble band, furnished with beggars' scrips and a self-chosen sobriquet to remind the King of his duty with mock humility; are responsible for—what else? Is a carnival charade to be accounted high treason? Are we to be grudged the small coloured rags which our youthful exuberance, our excited imagination may wrap around the wretched bareness of our lives? If you take life too seriously, what is it worth? If the mornings do not rouse us to new pleasures, if the evenings leave us without the comfort of hope, is it worth while to dress and undress at all? Does the sun shine for me today so that I may ponder on what happened yesterday? So that I may fathom and link that which is not to be fathomed or linked—the destiny of a future day? Spare me these considerations, leave them to scholars and courtiers. Let these reflect and make plans, creep and crawl, arrive where they may, creep their way into what positions they can. If any of this is of any use to you, without turning your epistle into a book, you are welcome to it. The dear old man takes everything too seriously. His letter makes me think of a friend who has long held my hand in his and presses it once more before releasing it.

SECRETARY. Forgive me, but it makes a pedestrian dizzy to watch a traveller rush past him with such speed.

EGMONT. Enough, my dear fellow! Not another word! As though whipped by invisible spirits, the horses of the sun, Time's horses, run away with the light chariot of our destinies; and we have no choice but to grip the reins with resolute courage and, now to the right, now to the left, avert the wheels from a stone here, a precipice there. As for the end of the journey, who knows what it is? When we hardly remember where it began.

SECRETARY. Oh, sir!

EGMONT. I stand in a high and prominent place and must rise still higher. I have hope, courage, and strength. I have not yet attained the crest of my growth and when I *have* attained the highest point, I shall stand there unwavering, without fear. If I must fall, let a thunderbolt, a gale, even a false step hurl me down into the depths; I shall not be alone there but with thousands of good men. I have never disdained to stake my all in war for the slightest gain, like any decent soldier; and do you expect me to turn niggard when the prize is nothing less than the entire worth of a free life?

SECRETARY. Oh, sir! You do not know what you are saying. May God preserve you!

EGMONT. Collect your papers now. Orange is coming. Complete whatever is most urgent, so that the couriers can leave before the gates are shut. Other things can



wait. Leave the letter to the Count till tomorrow. Don't fail to visit Elvira and give her my regards. Find out how the Regent is keeping; they say that she's not well, though she conceals it.

*Exit secretary. Enter Orange.*

EGMONT. Welcome, Orange. You seem somewhat constrained.

ORANGE. What do you say to our conversation with the Regent?

EGMONT. I saw nothing extraordinary in her manner of receiving us. It wasn't the first time I have seen her in that state. I had the impression that she was unwell.

ORANGE. Didn't you observe that she was more reticent? At first, she wanted to be calm and express her approval of our conduct during the new uprising of the mob. Later, she hinted that this could easily appear in a false light, then diverted the conversation to her usual topic: that her amiable, benevolent disposition, her friendship for us Netherlanders have never been duly appreciated, that we have taken it too much for granted, that none of her efforts seemed to lead to the desired results, that she might well grow weary in the end and the King resort to very different measures. Did you note all this?

EGMONT. No, not all of it; I was thinking of something different at the time. She is a woman, dear Orange, and women always wish that everyone will meekly creep under their gentle yoke, that every Hercules will doff his lion's skin and join their knitting group; that, because they desire peace, the ferment that seizes a people, the tempest that mighty rivals raise among themselves, can be soothed by a kind word, and that the most hostile elements will lie down together at their feet in gentle concord. That is the case with her also. And since she cannot bring about this state, she has no alternative but to become ill-tempered, to complain of ingratitude and lack of wisdom, to threaten us with terrible consequences and to threaten—that she will leave us!

ORANGE. And don't you believe that this time she will carry out her threat?

EGMONT. Never! How often I've seen her in her travelling clothes! Where could she go? Here she is Governor, Queen. Do you suppose that she relishes the thought of going into insignificant retirement at her brother's court? Or of going to Italy and burdening herself with the old family matters?

ORANGE. People think her incapable of such a decision because they have seen her hesitate and withdraw. And yet she has it in her; new circumstances drive her to the long-delayed resolution. What if she did go? And the King sent someone else?



EGMONT. Well, he would come, and would find plenty of things to occupy him. He would come with great plans, projects, and ideas of how to arrange, control, and hold together all things; and would be struggling with this trifle today, that trifle tomorrow, would come up against this obstruction the day after, spend a month on preparations and schemes, another on being disappointed with undertakings that have failed, half a year on the troubles caused by a single Province. For him too time would pass, his head would grow giddy, and one thing follow another as before, so that he would have cause to thank God if he succeeded in keeping his ship off the rocks instead of navigating great oceans along a charted course.

ORANGE. But what if someone advised the King to make an experiment?

EGMONT. And what might that be?

ORANGE. To see what the torso would do without a head.

EGMONT. What do you mean?

ORANGE. Egmont, for many years now I have been deeply concerned with all our affairs, my head always bent over them as over a chessboard, and I do not regard any move on the other side as insignificant. And just as idle persons enquire with the greatest care into the secrets of nature, so I consider it the duty, the vocation, of a prince to know the views and strategy of all parties. I have cause to fear an eruption. The King has long acted according to certain principles; he sees that these are inadequate; what can be more likely than that he will try other means?

EGMONT. That's not my opinion. When one grows old and has tried so many things and the world still refuses to become a tidy place, surely one puts up with it in the end.

ORANGE. There's one thing he hasn't tried.

EGMONT. Well?

ORANGE. To spare the people and destroy the princes.

EGMONT. An old fear, and widespread. It's not worth worrying about.

ORANGE. Once it was a worry; gradually it became a probability to me; finally, it's become a certainty.

EGMONT. And has the King any subjects more loyal than ourselves?

ORANGE. We serve him in our fashion; and we can admit to each other that we know well how to balance the King's rights against ours.

EGMONT. Who wouldn't? We are his subjects and pay him such tribute as is due to him.

ORANGE. But what if he claimed *more*, and called disloyalty what we call insisting on our rights?



EGMONT. We shall be able to defend ourselves. Let him convoke the Knights of the Golden Fleece; we shall submit to their judgement.

ORANGE. And what if the verdict precedes the trial, the punishment precedes the verdict?

EGMONT. That would be an injustice of which Philip could never be guilty, and an act of folly of which, in my view, both he and his counsellors are incapable——

ORANGE. And what if they did prove to be unjust and foolish?

EGMONT. No, Orange, it's impossible. Who would dare to lay hands on us? ... To arrest us would be a vain and useless act. No, they do not dare to raise the banner of tyranny so high. The gust of wind that would bear this news across the country would fan an enormous blaze. And what would be the point of it? It is not the King alone who has the right to judge and condemn. And would they destroy us in secret, like a band of vulgar assassins? They cannot even think of such a thing. A terrible pact would unite the whole people at once. Undying hatred and eternal separation from the Spanish name would violently declare themselves.

ORANGE. In that case the fire would rage over our graves, and the blood of our enemies would flow as an idle expiatory offering. Let us take thought to prevent it, Egmont.

EGMONT. But how can we?

ORANGE. Alba is on his way.

EGMONT. I don't believe it.

ORANGE. I know it.

EGMONT. The Regent would not hear of it.

ORANGE. Another reason for my conviction. The Regent will yield her place to him. I know his murderous disposition, and he will bring an army with him.

EGMONT. To harass the Provinces once more? The people will grow most unruly.

ORANGE. They will take care of the people's heads.

EGMONT. No, no, I say.

ORANGE. Let us leave, each for his Province. There we shall reinforce ourselves. He will not begin with a show of brute force.

EGMONT. Must we not be there to welcome him when he comes?

ORANGE. We shall procrastinate.

EGMONT. And if he demands our presence at his arrival, in the King's name?

ORANGE. We shall look for evasions.

EGMONT. And if he presses us?

ORANGE. We shall excuse ourselves.



EGMONT. And if he insists on it?

ORANGE. We shall refuse all the more firmly.

EGMONT. And war will have been declared, and we shall be rebels. Orange, don't let your cleverness mislead you; I know that it isn't fear that moves you to retreat. Consider the implications of this step.

ORANGE. I have considered them.

EGMONT. Consider what you will be guilty of, if you are wrong: of the most ruinous war that has ever laid waste a country. Your refusal will be the signal which calls all the provinces to arms at once; it will serve to justify every act of cruelty for which Spain has never lacked anything but a pretext. What we have long kept down with the utmost difficulty, you will rouse up with a single call to the most frightful turmoil. Think of the cities, the nobles, the people; of commerce, agriculture, the trades. And think of the destruction, the slaughter! ... True, in the field the soldier looks calmly upon his dying comrade; but it is the corpses of citizens, children, young women which will float down the rivers to where you stand. So that you will be filled with horror, no longer knowing whose cause you are defending, since those are perishing for whose freedom you took arms. And how will you feel when you have to tell yourself: it was for my safety that I took them?

ORANGE. We are not individual men, Egmont. If it is fitting for us to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of thousands, it is fitting too to spare ourselves for the sake of thousands.

EGMONT. The man who spares himself must become suspicious of himself.

ORANGE. The man who knows himself can advance or retreat with confidence.

EGMONT. The evil which you fear becomes a certainty by your deed.

ORANGE. It is prudent and bold to meet the inevitable disaster.

EGMONT. In a peril so great the slightest hope should be fostered.

ORANGE. There is no room left for the lightest manoeuvre on our part; the abyss lies right in front of us.

EGMONT. Is the King's favour so narrow a ledge?

ORANGE. Not so narrow, but slippery.

EGMONT. By God! You do him an injustice. I will not suffer anyone to think ill of him. He is Charles's son and incapable of baseness.

ORANGE. Kings are never guilty of baseness.

EGMONT. You should get to know him better.

ORANGE. It is that very knowledge which advises us not to await the outcome of this dangerous test.



EGMONT. No test is dangerous if one has the necessary courage.

ORANGE. You are getting excited, Egmont.

EGMONT. I must see with my own eyes.

ORANGE. Oh, if only you would see with mine for once! My dear friend, because your eyes are open you think that you see. I am going! Wait for Alba's arrival if you must, and God be with you! Perhaps my refusal will save you. Perhaps the dragon will think it has caught nothing if it cannot devour both of us at once. Perhaps it will hesitate, so as to be more sure of success, and perhaps by then you will see the matter in its true light. But be quick then! Quick as lightning! Save yourself. Save yourself, my friend. Farewell. Let nothing escape your watchfulness: the size of his army, how he occupies the city, how much power the Regent retains, how well your friends are prepared. Keep me informed....  
Egmont—

EGMONT. Well?

ORANGE (*taking his hand*). Let me persuade you. Come with me!

EGMONT. What, Orange, tears in *your* eyes?

ORANGE. To weep for one who is lost is not unmanly.

EGMONT. You regard me as lost?

ORANGE. You are. Think again! You have only the briefest of respites. Farewell.

*Exit.*

EGMONT (*alone*). Strange that other people's thoughts have such influence on us! It would never have occurred to me, and this man's apprehensions have infected me ... Away! It's an alien drop in my blood. Let my sound nature throw it out again! And there's one kind remedy still to bathe away the pensive wrinkles on my brow.

### ACT III

*The Regent's Palace  
Margaret of Parma.*

REGENT. I should have guessed it. Oh, if one's days are spent in toil and stress, one always thinks one is doing one's utmost; and the person who looks on from afar and gives orders believes he demands only what is possible.... Oh, these Kings! ... I should never have thought that it could grieve me so. It is so pleasant to



rule! ... And to abdicate? ... I cannot think how my father could do it; and yet I shall do it also.

*Machiavelli appears in the background.*

REGENT. Come closer, Machiavelli! I am just thinking about my brother's letter.

MACHIABELLI. And may I know what it contains?

REGENT. As much tender attention to me as solicitude for his states. He commends the steadfastness, industry, and loyalty with which I have hitherto upheld the rights of His Majesty in these Provinces. He pities me because the unruly people is causing me so much trouble now. He is so entirely convinced of the profundity of my insight, so extraordinarily pleased with the prudence of my conduct, that I must almost say: the letter is too well written for a King, certainly for a brother.

MACHIABELLI. This is not the first time he has informed you of his well-deserved satisfaction.

REGENT. But the first time it is a mere figure of rhetoric.

MACHIABELLI. I don't follow you.

REGENT. You will. For after this induction, he expresses the opinion that without a bodyguard, without a small army, I shall always cut a bad figure here. We were wrong, he says, to withdraw our soldiers from the Provinces because the population complained. An occupation force, he believes, which loads down the citizen's neck prevents him by its weight from indulging in high leaps.

MACHIABELLI. It would have a most unsettling effect on the people's state of mind.

REGENT. The King, however, is of the opinion—Are you listening? He is of the opinion that an efficient general, one who does not listen to reason, would very soon put the people and nobility, citizens and peasantry, in their place; and is therefore sending a powerful force commanded—by the Duke of Alba.

MACHIABELLI. Alba?

REGENT. That surprises you?

MACHIABELLI. You say he is sending. I suppose he asks you whether he should send.

REGENT. The King does not ask, he sends.

MACHIABELLI. In that case you will have an experienced military man in your service.

REGENT. In my service? Speak your mind, Machiavelli!

MACHIABELLI. I am anxious not to anticipate, madam.



REGENT. And I am anxious to disguise the truth! It is very painful to me, very painful. I wish my brother had said what he thinks instead of sending formal epistles which a Secretary of State has drawn up.

MACHIAVELLI. Should we not try to understand ...

REGENT. But I know them by heart. They want the place cleaned and swept; and since they do not act themselves, they lend their trust to any man who appears broom in hand. Oh, I can see the King and his Council as clearly as if they were embroidered on this tapestry.

MACHIAVELLI. So vividly?

REGENT. Not a single feature is missing. There are good men among them. Honest Rodrick, who is so experienced and moderate, does not aim too high and yet lets nothing fall too low. Honest Alonzo, hard-working Freneda, solid Las Vagas and a few others who will cooperate when the good party comes into power. But on the other side there sits the hollow-eyed Toledan with the brazen brow and the deep, fiery glance, mumbling between his teeth of female softheartedness, misplaced indulgence, and that women may sit a horse already broken, but make poor equerries themselves, and other such pleasantries to which I once had to listen in the company of the political gentlemen.

MACHIAVELLI. You have chosen a good palette for the portrait.

REGENT. Admit it, Machiavelli, of all the colours and shades with which I could choose to paint no tone is as yellow-brown, as gall-black as the colour of Alba's face or as the colour with which he paints. To him, everyone is a blasphemer, a traitor to the King; for on that score he can have them all racked, burnt, hanged, drawn and quartered.... The good I have done here probably looks like nothing from a distance, simply because it is good. So he will seize on every caprice long past, recall every disturbance long ago put down; and the King will have such a vision of mutiny, rebellion, and recklessness that he will think the people here devour one another, when we have long forgotten some fleeting, passing misconduct of a nation still rough. Then he will conceive a deep, heartfelt hatred for these poor people; they will seem repulsive to him, indeed like beasts and monsters; he will look around for fire and sword, imagining that that is how to tame men.

MACHIAVELLI. I think you exaggerate a little and take the whole matter too seriously. After all, you will be Regent still.

REGENT. Oh, I know all about that. He will bring a royal directive. I have grown old enough in affairs of state to know how one displaces a person without depriving him of his rank and title. First he will bring a royal directive, which will be

twisted and vague; he will make changes all around him, for he has the power, and if I complain he will use the pretext of a secret directive; if I ask to see it, he will prevaricate; if I insist, he will show me a document that contains something quite different; and if I am still not satisfied, he will do no more than he would if I were speaking. Meanwhile he will have done what I fear and irrevocably averted what I wish.

MACHIAVELLI. I wish I could contradict you.

REGENT. What I have calmed with unspeakable patience, he will stir up again by hardheartedness and cruelty. I shall see my work perish before my very eyes and bear the blame for his acts into the bargain.

MACHIAVELLI. Do not anticipate, Your Highness.

REGENT. Well, I still have enough self-control to be quiet. Let him come, I shall make way for him with good grace before he pushes me out.

MACHIAVELLI. And you will take this grave step with such alacrity?

REGENT. It's more difficult for me than you think. If one is accustomed to rule, if it was given to one in youth to hold the fate of thousands daily in one's hand, one descends from the throne as into a grave. But sooner than remain like a spectre among the living and with hollow gestures lay claim to a place which another has inherited, possesses, and enjoys.

*Clare's House*  
*Clare and Mother.*

MOTHER. Never have I seen such love as Brackenburg's; I thought it was only to be found in legends about heroes.

CLARE (*walks up and down the room, humming a song with closed lips*).

Happy alone  
Is whom love has in thrall.

MOTHER. He suspects how you stand with Egmont. And I think that if you gave him a little encouragement, if you wanted him to, he would still marry you.

CLARE (*sings*).

Gladdened  
And saddened  
And troubled in vain,  
Longing



And thronging  
With wavering pain,  
Raised up to heaven,  
The deeper to fall,  
Happy alone  
Is whom love has in thrall.

MOTHER. Oh, leave off the “by-low, lie-low.”

CLARE. No, don’t say anything against it. It’s a powerful song. More than once I’ve lulled a big child to sleep with it.

MOTHER. You can’t think of anything except your love. If only you wouldn’t forget everything because of that *one* thing. You should have some respect for Brackenburgh, I tell you. He might still make you happy one day.

CLARE. Brackenburgh?

MOTHER. Oh yes, there will come a time.... You children foresee nothing and will not listen to our experience. Youth and true love, it all comes to an end; and there comes a time when one gives thanks to God for somewhere to lay one’s head.

CLARE (*shudders, keeps silent, and then bursts out*). Mother, let the time come then, like death. To think of it in advance is horrible! And what if it does come! If we must—then—then we shall face up to it as best we can. To think of losing Egmont!

*In tears.*

No, it’s impossible, quite impossible.

*Enter Egmont in a riding cloak, his hat pressed down onto his face.*

EGMONT. Clare!

CLARE (*utters a scream, totters*). Egmont!

*She runs to him.*

Egmont!

*She embraces him and rests her head on his shoulder.*

Oh, my dear, good, darling Egmont! So you’ve come. You’re here!

EGMONT. Good evening, Mother.

MOTHER. Welcome to our house, Your Lordship. My little girl nearly pined away because of your long absence; she spent the whole day, as usual, talking and singing about you.

EGMONT. You'll give me some supper, won't you?

MOTHER. You do us too much honour. If only we had something to offer you.

CLARE. Of course we have. Don't worry about it, Mother; I've made all the arrangements already and prepared something. But don't let me down, Mother.

MOTHER. It's paltry enough.

CLARE. Just be patient. And besides, I say to myself: when he's with me, I'm not in the least hungry, so he shouldn't have too big an appetite when I'm with him.

EGMONT. Do you think so?

*Clare stamps her foot and turns her back on him in a pique.*

EGMONT. What's the matter with you?

CLARE. Oh, you're so chilly today. You haven't offered to kiss me yet. Why do you keep your arms wrapped in your cloak like a new-born baby? It isn't right for a soldier or a lover to keep his arms wrapped up.

EGMONT. At times it is, sweetheart, at times. When the soldier is on his guard and trying to get the better of his enemy by stealth, he pulls himself together, puts his arms around himself, and waits till his plan of action has matured. And a lover ...

MOTHER. Won't you sit down, make yourself comfortable? I must go to the kitchen. Clare forgets everything when you're here. You will have to make do with what we have to offer.

EGMONT. Your good will is the best spice.

*Exit Mother.*

CLARE. And what would you call my love?

EGMONT. Anything you like.

CLARE. Compare it to something, if you have the heart.

EGMONT. Well, first of all ...

*He throws off his cloak and stands there splendidly dressed.*

CLARE. Goodness!



EGMONT. Now my arms are free.

*He hugs her.*

CLARE. Stop it! You'll spoil your appearance.

*She steps back.*

How splendid it is! Now I mustn't touch you.

EGMONT. Are you satisfied? I promised I'd come dressed in Spanish fashion one day.

CLARE. I never asked you again. I thought you didn't want to.... Oh, and the Golden Fleece!

EGMONT. Well, there it is for you.

CLARE. And did the Emperor hang it around your neck?

EGMONT. Yes, child. And the chain and the pendant grant the most noble liberties to the man who wears them. There is no one on earth who has the right to judge my actions other than the Grand Master of the Order, together with the assembled company of Knights.

CLARE. Oh, you could let the whole world stand in judgement over you! The velvet is too lovely for words, and the gold thread! And the embroidery! ... One doesn't know where to begin.

EGMONT. Look your fill.

CLARE. And the Golden Fleece! You told me the story and said it was a symbol of all that is great and precious, only to be earned and won by the most strenuous endeavours. It is very precious—I can compare it to your love. I wear it next to my heart as well—and then ...

EGMONT. What were you going to say?

CLARE. And then the comparison doesn't apply.

EGMONT. How do you mean?

CLARE. Because I haven't won your love by strenuous endeavours; I haven't earned it.

EGMONT. In love it's different. You have earned it because you don't try to win it, and usually only those people get it who don't chase after it.

CLARE. Did you derive that conclusion from yourself? Did you make this proud observation about yourself? You, whom all the people loves?

EGMONT. If only I'd done something for them! If only I could do something for them. It is their kind will to love me.

CLARE. I suppose you saw the Regent today?

EGMONT. I did.

CLARE. Are you on good terms with her?

EGMONT. It looks that way. We are amiable and helpful to each other.

CLARE. And in your heart?

EGMONT. I wish her well. Each of us has his own aims. But that is neither here nor there. She's an excellent woman, knows her men, and would see deep enough even if she weren't suspicious. I cause her a great deal of trouble because she is always looking for secret motives behind my conduct, and I have none.

CLARE. None at all?

EGMONT. Well, yes. A few little reservations. Every wine leaves a deposit of tartar if it's left long enough in the barrel. But Orange provides better entertainment for her all the same, and sets her new puzzles incessantly. He has made people believe that he always harbours some secret project; and so now she is always looking at his forehead wondering what he's thinking, or at his steps, wondering where he may be directing them.

CLARE. Does she conceal her motives?

EGMONT. She's the Regent. What do you expect?

CLARE. Forgive me. What I meant to ask was: is she deceitful?

EGMONT. No more and no less than anyone who wishes to attain his ends.

CLARE. I could never be at home in the great world. But then she has a masculine mind; she's a different kind of woman from us seamstresses and cooks. She is noble, brave, resolute.

EGMONT. Yes, as long as things are not too topsy-turvy. This time she's not so sure of herself.

CLARE. How so?

EGMONT. She has a little moustache too, on her upper lip, and occasional attacks of gout. A real Amazon.

CLARE. A majestic woman! I should be afraid to enter her presence.

EGMONT. You're not usually so shy. But then it wouldn't be fear, only girlish modesty.

*Clare casts down her eyes, takes his hand, and nestles against him.*

EGMONT. I understand you, my dear. You can raise your eyes.

CLARE. Let me be silent. Let me hold you. Let me look into your eyes: find everything in them, comfort and hope and joy and grief.



*She puts her arms around him and looks at him.*

Tell me. Tell me. I don't understand. Are you Egmont? Count Egmont, the great Egmont who raises such an ado, whom the newspapers write about, whom the Provinces adore?

EGMONT. No, my little Clare, I am not.

CLARE. What?

EGMONT. You see—Clare! Let me sit down.

*He sits down, she kneels in front of him on a stool, puts her arms on his knees, and looks at him.*

That Egmont is an ill-tempered, stiff, cold Egmont, who has to keep up appearances, now make this face, now that; who is tormented, misunderstood, entangled, while other people think he is gay and carefree; loved by a people that does not know its own mind, honoured and carried aloft by a mob for which there is no help; surrounded by friends on whom he must not rely; closely watched by men who desire to harm him in every possible way; toiling and striving, often aimlessly, nearly always unrewarded.... Oh, let me say no more about him! How he fares, how he feels! But this one, Clare, this one is calm, candid, happy, beloved and understood by the best of hearts, which he too understands wholly and presses to him with complete love and trust.

*He embraces her.*

That is *your* Egmont.

CLARE. Then let me die. The world has no joys beyond these!

## ACT IV

*A Street*

*Jetter. Carpenter.*

JETTER. Hey, there. Hush. Hey, there, neighbour, a word with you!

CARPENTER. Be on your way and keep quiet.

JETTER. Only one word. No news?

CARPENTER. None, except that we've been forbidden to talk of the news.

JETTER. What do you mean?

CARPENTER. Come close to the wall of this house. Keep your eyes and ears open.

As soon as he arrived the Duke of Alba issued an order to the effect that if two or three are found talking together in the street they will be declared guilty of high treason without examination or trial.

JETTER. Oh, dreadful!

CARPENTER. The penalty for discussing affairs of state is life imprisonment.

JETTER. All our liberty lost!

CARPENTER. And on pain of death no one is to express disapproval of the government's actions.

JETTER. And our heads likely to be lost as well!

CARPENTER. And great rewards will be promised to induce fathers, mothers, children, relations, friends, servants to reveal what is going on in the home to a special court appointed for that purpose.

JETTER. Let's go home.

CARPENTER. And those who obey are promised that they will suffer no harm in their persons or property.

JETTER. How gracious of them! Didn't I feel aggrieved as soon as the Duke entered our city? Ever since, I've felt as though the sky were covered with black crêpe and hung down so low that one has to bend down to avoid knocking one's head against it.

CARPENTER. And how did you like his soldiers? They're a different kettle of fish to the ones we're used to. Don't you agree?

JETTER. Disgusting! It freezes your marrow to see a body of them march down the street. Straight as posts, their eyes glued on the next man's back, not a single man out of step. And when they're on guard duty and you pass by, you feel as though they could see right into your head, and they look so stiff and grumpy that you seem to see a taskmaster at every corner. They made me feel ill. Our militia, at least, was a gay lot. They took liberties, stood about with legs straddled, wore their hats over one eye, lived, and let live; but those fellows are like machines with a devil inside.

CARPENTER. If one of them calls out "Halt!" and jumps to the alert, do you think one would stop?

JETTER. It would be the death of me at once!

CARPENTER. Let's go home.

JETTER. No good will come of this. Good-bye.

*Enter Soest.*



SOEST. Friends! Comrades!

CARPENTER. Quiet. Don't detain us.

SOEST. Have you heard?

JETTER. Only too much!

SOEST. The Regent has left.

JETTER. Now God have mercy on us!

CARPENTER. She was our only hope.

SOEST. Suddenly, and in secret. She didn't get on with the Duke; she sent a message to the nobles to say she will return. No one believes it.

CARPENTER. May God forgive the nobles for allowing this new scourge to descend on our backs. They could have prevented it. All our privileges are lost.

JETTER. Not a word about privileges, for God's sake. I can smell the powder of a firing squad. The sun refuses to rise, the mists reek of rotten flesh.

SOEST. Orange is gone too.

CARPENTER. That means we've been left to our fate.

SOEST. Count Egmont is still with us.

JETTER. Thank God for that. May all the saints give him strength, so that he'll do his best; he is the only one who can help us.

*Enter Vansen.*

VANSEN. Well, fancy that. A few citizens who haven't yet crept away into their dens!

JETTER. Do us a favour: be on your way.

VANSEN. You're not very polite.

CARPENTER. This isn't the time for fine phrases. Are you looking for trouble again? Has your back healed already?

VANSEN. Never ask a soldier about his wounds. If I couldn't take a hiding at times, I shouldn't have got anywhere.

JETTER. Things may become more serious.

VANSEN. It seems that the approaching thunderstorm is making all your limbs feel miserably tired.

CARPENTER. If you don't keep quiet your limbs will soon start moving in a different direction.

VANSEN. Poor little mice, to fall into despair, just because the master of the house has got himself a new cat! Things have changed a bit, that's all; but we shall go about our business just as we did before, never you worry!

CARPENTER. You're a loud-mouthed good-for-nothing.

VANSEN. As for you, brother nitwit, let the Duke do his worst. The old tomcat looks as if he's been eating devils instead of mice, and now he's got indigestion as a result. Just let him get on with it; he has to eat, drink, and sleep like the rest of us. I'm not at all anxious about us, if only we take our time. At the start all goes easily; but later he too will find out that it's more pleasant to live in the larder where the bacon is stored, and to rest at night than to stalk a few mice in the loft, with nothing but fruit all around. Just keep calm. I know what governors are like.

CARPENTER. There's no telling what a fellow like that will blurt out. If I'd ever said anything like it, I shouldn't feel safe for a minute.

VANSEN. Don't you worry, God in heaven doesn't hear anything about worms of your sort, let alone the Regent.

JETTER. Filthy blasphemer!

VANSEN. I know of some people for whom it would be a lot better if they acted the hero less and had a little more discretion instead.

CARPENTER. What do you mean by that?

VANSEN. Hmm! The Count is what I mean.

JETTER. Egmont? What has he got to fear?

VANSEN. I'm a poor devil and could live a whole year on what he loses in one night. And yet he'd do well to give me his income for a whole year if he could have my head for a quarter of an hour.

JETTER. That's what you think. Egmont's got more sense in his hair than you have in your brain.

VANSEN. Say what you like. But he hasn't got more subtlety. It's the great lords who're the first to deceive themselves. He shouldn't be so trusting.

JETTER. Stuff and nonsense. A nobleman like Egmont?

VANSEN. That's just it. Just because he isn't a tailor.

JETTER. Dirty slanderer!

VANSEN. What I wish him is to have your courage just for an hour, so that it could trouble him and make him itch till it drives him out of town.

JETTER. You speak like a fool; he's as safe as a star in the sky.

VANSEN. Have you never seen one shoot off? ... Gone in a jiffy.

CARPENTER. Who could harm him?

VANSEN. Who could harm him? Why, do you think you could prevent it? Are you going to start a rebellion when they arrest him?

JETTER. Oh!



VANSEN. Would you risk your skin for his sake?

SOEST. Eh!

VANSEN (*imitating them*). Ee, ah, oo! Run through the whole alphabet to express your surprise! That's how it is and how it will be. God have mercy on him.

JETTER. I'm shocked by your impudence. Such a noble, righteous man——And you talk of danger?

VANSEN. It's the knave who does well for himself everywhere. On the stool of repentance he makes a fool of the judge; on the judgement seat he delights in making a criminal out of the prosecutor. I once had to copy one of those documents, when the Chief of Police received a load of praise and money from Court because he'd made a self-confessed rascal out of some honest soul they wanted out of the way.

CARPENTER. That's another arrant lie! How can they find any evidence, if the man is innocent?

VANSEN. Oh, my poor sparrow-brain! When there's nothing to be read out of the evidence, they read something into it. Honesty makes you rash—it can make you stubborn too. So they start by asking harmless questions, and the accused is proud of his innocence, as they call it, so he blurts out everything which a sensible man would conceal. Then the prosecutor makes new questions out of the answers and carefully notes any little contradiction that may appear. That's where he attaches his rope, and if the poor fool allows himself to be convinced that he's said too much here, too little there, and perhaps withheld some piece of evidence for no reason at all; or if, in the end, he allows them to frighten him—well, in that case, they're well on the way. And I assure you that the beggar women who pick rags out of the rubbish bins are not more thorough than one of those rogue-makers when he's set his heart on patching together a straw-and-rag scarecrow out of every little crooked, twisted, rumped, hidden, familiar, denied indication and circumstance, if only to be able to hang his victim in effigy. And the poor fellow has cause to be thankful if he lives to see himself hanged.

JETTER. No one can say he hasn't a fluent tongue in his head.

CARPENTER. That kind of talk may work with flies. But wasps laugh at the yarns you spin.

VANSEN. After the spiders have gone. Look, that tall Duke looks just like one of your garden spiders; not one of the fat-bellied ones—they're less dangerous—but one of the long-legged kind with small bodies that don't get fat with eating and spin very fine threads, though all the tougher for that.

JETTER. Egmont is a Knight of the Golden Fleece: who would dare to lay hands on

him? He can only be judged by those of his own kind, by the entire Order. It's your foul mouth and your bad conscience that make you talk such gibberish.

VANSEN. What makes you think I don't wish him well? I've nothing against him. He's an excellent gentleman. He let off a couple of my best friends, who would otherwise have been hanged by now, with a sound whipping. Now, off with you! Get along! That's my advice to you now. I can see a new patrol just starting their rounds over there, and they don't look as if they're going to drink our health. We mustn't be in too much of a hurry, but stand and look on for a while. I've a couple of nieces and an old crony who keeps a tavern; if those men aren't tame by the time they've tasted their wares, they must be as tough as wolves.

*Culenburg Palace. The Duke of Alba's Residence Silva and Gomez meet.*

SILVA. Have you carried out the Duke's instructions?

GOMEZ. Punctiliously. All the daily patrols have been ordered to appear at the appointed time at the different places I have detailed to them; meanwhile, they will patrol the town as usual to maintain the peace. None knows about any of the others; each patrol thinks that the order concerns only its own men, and the cordon can be closed in a moment when necessary so that every approach to the Palace will be cut off. Do you know the reason for this order?

SILVA. I am accustomed to obey orders without questioning them. And who is easier to obey than the Duke, since the outcome will soon prove that his instructions were judicious?

GOMEZ. Oh yes, of course. And I am not surprised to find that you're growing as uncommunicative and monosyllabic as he is since you have to attend him all the time. It seems strange to me, since I am used to the lighter Italian etiquette. My loyalty and obedience are the same as ever; but I have got into the habit of chattering and arguing. As for you people, you keep silent all the time and never relax. The Duke seems to me like an iron tower without any door to which his staff have the key. The other day I heard him remark at table about some carefree, affable fellow that he was like a bad tavern with a sign advertising brandy to attract idlers, beggars, and thieves.

SILVA. And did he not lead us in silence to this place?

GOMEZ. There's no denying that. Certainly, anyone who witnessed his skill in moving the army here from Italy has seen something worth remembering. How he twined his way, as it were, through friend and foe, through the French, the King's men, and the heretics, through the Swiss and their confederates,



maintained the strictest discipline and succeeded in conducting so potentially dangerous a movement with such ease and without giving offence to anyone. We have certainly seen something and learnt something.

SILVA. And here too. Isn't everything peaceful and quiet, as though there had never been any uprising?

GOMEZ. Well, it was quiet in most places when we arrived.

SILVA. The Provinces are a great deal calmer than they were; and if anyone does move now, it's in order to flee. But he will soon put an end to that as well, if I'm not mistaken.

GOMEZ. The King will be pleased with him as never before.

SILVA. And nothing remains more urgent for us than to be sure of *his* pleasure. If the King should come here, the Duke and anyone whom he commends will doubtless be generously rewarded.

GOMEZ. Do you think that the King will come?

SILVA. The many preparations that are being made would suggest that it is very likely.

GOMEZ. They don't convince me.

SILVA. In that case, at least refrain from evincing an opinion on the matter. For if it is not the King's intention to come, what is certain is that we are intended to believe so.

*Enter Ferdinand, Alba's natural son.*

FERDINAND. Has my father not come out?

SILVA. We are waiting for him.

FERDINAND. The princes will soon be here.

GOMEZ. Are they expected today?

FERDINAND. Orange and Egmont.

GOMEZ (*softly to Silva*). Something has dawned on me.

SILVA. Then keep it to yourself!

*Enter the Duke of Alba. As he enters and comes forward, the others step back.*

ALBA. Gomez!

GOMEZ (*comes forward*). My Lord!

ALBA. You have instructed and detailed the guards?

GOMEZ. With the utmost precision. The daily patrols——

ALBA. Very well. You will wait in the gallery. Silva will inform you of the exact

moment when you will call them in and occupy the approaches to the Palace.  
You know the rest.

GOMEZ. Yes.

*Exit.*

ALBA. Silva!

SILVA. Here I am.

ALBA. Everything I have valued in you—courage, determination, promptness in the execution of orders—all these you must show today.

SILVA. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to prove that I am unchanged.

ALBA. As soon as the princes have entered my cabinet, lose no time in arresting Egmont's private secretary. You have made all the necessary arrangements to seize the other persons who have been indicated?

SILVA. Rely on us! Their fate, like a well-calculated eclipse of the sun, will meet them punctually and terribly.

ALBA. You have kept all their movements under observation?

SILVA. Not one has escaped me. Especially not Egmont's. He is the only one whose conduct has not changed since your arrival. Spends the whole day trying out one horse after another, invites guests, is always merry and amusing at table, plays at dice, shoots, and creeps to his sweetheart at night. Whereas the others have made a distinct break in their way of life. They stay at home; the fronts of their houses look like those of men who are ill in bed.

ALBA. Hurry, therefore, before they recover against our will.

SILVA. I shall catch them. At your command we shall overwhelm them with official honours. Panic will seize them. Diplomatically they offer us cautious thanks and feel that it would be wisest to flee; not one of them dares to move one step; they hesitate, cannot get together; and his social sense prevents each one from acting boldly for himself. They would like to avoid all suspicion and yet they become more and more suspect. With the greatest pleasure I foresee the complete success of your stratagem.

ALBA. I take pleasure only in the accomplished act ... and not easily even in that, for there always remains something to give us cause for thought and anxiety. Fortune, in her obstinate way, may insist on conferring glory on what is base and worthless, and on dishonouring well-considered deeds with a base outcome. Wait here till the princes come, then give Gomez the order to occupy the streets and at once proceed in person to arrest Egmont's secretary and the others that



have been indicated to you. When you have done so, come here and report it to my son, so that he may convey the news to me in the cabinet.

SILVA. I hope to have the honour of attending on you tonight.

*Alba goes to his son, who has been standing on the gallery.*

SILVA. I dare not tell him, but I am losing hope. I fear it will not be as he thinks. I see spirits who, silent and pensive, weigh the destiny of princes and many thousands of men on black scales. Slowly the pointer vacillates, the judges seem deep in thought. At last this scale goes down, that one rises at the breath of obstinate Fortune, and the verdict has been pronounced.

*Exit.*

ALBA (*stepping forward with Ferdinand*). What was your impression of the city?

FERDINAND. Everything has become very quiet. As though to pass the time of day I rode up and down the streets. Your well-distributed patrols keep their fear so tense that no one dares to breathe a word. The city looks like a field when a thunderstorm flashes in the distance: one doesn't see a bird or an animal that isn't scurrying off to seek shelter.

ALBA. Is that all you saw and encountered?

FERDINAND. Egmont came riding into the market-place with some men. We exchanged greetings; he had an unruly horse, which I was compelled to praise. "Let us lose no time in breaking in horses, we shall need them soon!" he called out to me. He said we should meet again this very day, as he was coming at your request to confer with you.

ALBA. He will meet you again.

FERDINAND. Of all the noblemen I know here I like him best. It seems that we shall be friends.

ALBA. You are still too impetuous and incautious; you always remind me of your mother's fecklessness which drove her unconditionally into my arms. More than once appearances have led you to enter into dangerous relationships precipitately.

FERDINAND. You will find me flexible.

ALBA. Because of your young blood I forgive these impulsive affections, this heedless gaiety. Only never forget what is the work I was called to accomplish, nor what part in it I wish to entrust to you.

FERDINAND. Admonish me and do not spare me, where you think it necessary.

ALBA (*after a pause*). My son!

FERDINAND. My father!

ALBA. The princes will soon be here. Orange and Egmont are coming. It is not out of mistrust that I now reveal to you what will happen. They will not leave this Palace.

FERDINAND. What is your plan?

ALBA. It has been decided to hold them here.... You are astonished! Now, hear what you are to do. As for the reasons, you will know them when it is done; there is no time now to go into them. You are the one with whom I would wish to discuss the greatest, most secret issues. A strong bond unites us. You are dear and close to me. I should like to confide everything to you. It is not the habit of obedience alone that I wish to inculcate in you, but also the capacity to plan, to command, to execute—these too I should like to perpetuate in you. To leave you a great inheritance and the King the most useful of servants; to provide you with the best that I have, so that you need not be ashamed to take your place among your brothers.

FERDINAND. How can I ever repay the debt of this love that you bestow on me alone, while a whole Empire trembles with awe of you?

ALBA. Now listen: this is what I want you to do. As soon as the princes have entered, every point of access to the Palace will be occupied. Gomez will see to this. Silva will hasten to arrest Egmont's secretary and other highly suspicious persons. You will supervise the guards at the gate and in the courts. Above all, put your most reliable men into the rooms adjoining this one, then wait in the gallery till Silva returns to bring me some insignificant paper as a sign that his commission has been executed. Then stay in the antechamber till Orange leaves. Follow him; I shall detain Egmont here, as if there were something else I wished to discuss with him. At the end of the gallery demand Orange's sword, call the guard, quickly put away the dangerous fellow; and I shall seize Egmont here.

FERDINAND. I shall obey you, Father. For the first time with a heavy heart and with anxiety.

ALBA. I forgive you; it's the first great day you have known.

*Enter Silva.*

SILVA. A messenger from Antwerp. Here is Orange's letter! He is not coming.

ALBA. Is that what the messenger tells you?

SILVA. No, it's my heart that tells me.



ALBA. My evil genius speaks in you.

*After reading the letter he waves his hand at both of them, and they withdraw to the gallery. He remains alone in the front.*

He is not coming! And he puts off his explanation till the last moment. He dares *not* to come. So this time, contrary to my expectations, the prudent man was prudent enough not to be prudent. Time presses. Only a little turn more of the minute hand and a great work will have been done or missed, irrevocably missed; for it can neither be repeated nor kept secret. Long ago I had considered every possibility, even this one, and determined what was to be done in this case. And now that it has to be done I can hardly prevent the *pro* and *contra* from vacillating once more in my mind.... Is it wise to catch the others if he escapes me? Should I postpone it and let Egmont go with his men, with so many of them, who now, perhaps only today, are in my power? Thus Fate compels me, who was invincible. How long I pondered it! How well I prepared it! How fine and great was my plan! How close my hope to its aim! And now, at the moment of decision, I am placed between two evils. As into a lottery urn, I plunge my hand into the dark future: what I draw out is still tightly folded, unknown to me, perhaps a winner, perhaps a blank.

*He grows alert, as if he can hear something, and steps to the window.*

It's he! Egmont! Did your horse carry you in so easily, without sensing the smell of blood or the spirit with drawn sword who received you at the gate? ... Dismount! ... Now you have one foot in the grave; and now both feet! Yes, go on and stroke it, pat its neck for serving you so bravely—for the last time—and to me no choice remains. Never could Egmont hand himself over a second time as dazzled as he is now.... Listen!

*Ferdinand and Silva approach hurriedly.*

ALBA. You will do as I commanded; I do not change my mind. I shall detain Egmont as best I can until you, Ferdinand, have brought me news about Silva. Then remain close to me! You, also, Fate deprives of this great merit, to have caught the King's greatest enemy with your own hands.

*To Silva.*

Make haste!

*To Ferdinand.*

Go to meet him!

*Alba, left alone for a few moments, paces the room in silence. Enter Egmont.*

EGMONT. I come to hear the King's will, to discover what service he asks of our loyalty which remains eternally devoted to him.

ALBA. What he desires above all is to know your opinion.

EGMONT. On what matter? Is Orange coming too? I expected to find him here.

ALBA. I much regret his absence at this important hour. The King desires your opinion, your advice, as to how these States can be pacified. Indeed he hopes that you will effectively collaborate in the task of curbing the unrest and establishing complete and lasting order in the Provinces.

EGMONT. You must know better than I that everything is quiet enough already, and indeed was more quiet still before the appearance of the new soldiers filled the people with fear and anxiety.

ALBA. If I am not mistaken, you wish to imply that it would have been most advisable on the King's part never to have placed me in the position of asking your advice.

EGMONT. I beg your pardon. It is not for me to judge whether the King should have sent the army, whether the power of his royal presence alone would not have proved more effective. The army is here; he is not. But we should be very ungrateful, very unmindful, if we did not remember what we owe to the Regent. Let us admit it: by her conduct, as wise as it was brave, she succeeded in quelling the insurgents by force and by esteem, by cunning and persuasion; and, to the astonishment of the whole world, in the space of a few months she recalled a rebellious people to its duty.

ALBA. I don't deny it. The riot has been put down, and everyone seems to have been driven back into the bonds of obedience. But does it not depend on each one's arbitrary whim whether or not he chooses to remain in them? Who will prevent the people from breaking out again? Where is the power that will restrain them? Who guarantees to us that they will continue to prove loyal subjects? Their good will is all the security we have.

EGMONT. And is not the good will of a people the safest and noblest of securities? By God! When can a King feel more secure than when all of them stand by one,



and one stands by all? More secure, I mean, from internal and external enemies?  
ALBA. Surely we are not going to persuade ourselves that this is the case in these Provinces at present?

EGMONT. Let the King issue a general amnesty, let him set their minds at rest, and we shall soon see loyalty and love return in the train of trust.

ALBA. And let everyone who has profaned the King's majesty, the sanctity of religion, go about scot-free where he pleases? To serve as a walking proof to others that atrocious crimes go unpunished?

EGMONT. But should not a crime of folly, of drunkenness, be excused rather than cruelly punished? Especially where there is well-founded hope, if not certainty, that these evils will not recur? Were kings any less secure, are they not praised by contemporaries and by posterity alike for finding it in them to pardon, pity, or despise an affront to their dignity? Is it not for that very reason that they are likened to God, who is far too great to be affected by every blasphemy?

ALBA. And for that very reason the King must fight for the dignity of God and religion, and we for the King's honour. What the One Above disdains to parry, it is our duty to avenge. Where I am judge, no guilty man shall rejoice in his impunity.

EGMONT. Do you think, then, that you will reach them all? Don't we hear daily that terror is driving them from one place to another, and out of the country? The richest will remove their wealth, themselves, their children, and their friends; the poor will place their hands at their neighbours' service.

ALBA. They will, if we cannot prevent them. That is why the King demands advice and help of all the princes, seriousness of every governor; not only tales about how things are and how they might be if we allowed everything to go on as it is. To look upon a great evil, flatter oneself with hope, put one's trust in time, at the most to deliver one blow, as in a carnival farce so that one can hear the smack and appear to be doing something when one's desire is to do nothing—might not this arouse the suspicion that one is watching the rebellion with pleasure, unwilling to incite it, yet glad to encourage it?

EGMONT (*about to lose his temper, restrains himself and, after a short pause, says calmly*). Not every intention is manifest, and the intentions of many are early misinterpreted. Thus we are told everywhere that the King's intention is not so much to rule the Provinces in accordance with clear and unambiguous laws, to protect the majesty of religion and grant general peace to his people, as to enslave them absolutely, deprive them of their ancient rights, grasp their possessions, curtail the fine privileges of the aristocracy, for whose sake alone

the noble man would dedicate body and soul to his service. Religion, they say, is only a splendid screen behind which every dangerous scheme can be more easily hatched. The people are on their knees and worship the holy embroidered emblems, but behind the screen the bird catcher lurks and listens, waiting to ensnare them.

ALBA. Must I hear this from *you*?

EGMONT. These are not my views. Only what is said and rumoured abroad by great and small, foolish and wise alike. The Netherlands fear a double yoke; and who has pledged to maintain their freedom?

ALBA. Freedom? A fine word, if only one could understand it! What kind of freedom do they want? What is the freedom of the most free? To do what is right! ... And in this the King will not hinder them. No, no! They do not feel free if they cannot harm themselves and others. Would it not be better to abdicate than to rule such a people? When foreign enemies press us, of whom no citizen is aware because he is concerned with the most immediate things, and the King asks for help, they will quarrel among themselves and make common cause with their enemies. Far better to hedge them in, to treat them like children, so that one can lead them to their own welfare like children. Believe me, a people does not grow up, or grow wise; a people remains perpetually childish.

EGMONT. How rarely a King attains discretion! And should not the many put their trust in the many rather than in one? And not even in one, but in the few that surround the one, the clan that grows old under its master's gaze? I suppose this clan alone has the right to grow wise.

ALBA. Perhaps it has, just because it is not left to its own devices.

EGMONT. And for that reason is reluctant to leave anyone else to his own devices. Do what you please. I've replied to your question and repeat: it will not work. It cannot work. I know my compatriots. They are men worthy to walk on God's earth; each one a world to himself, a little king, steadfast, active, capable, loyal, attached to old customs. It is hard to win their confidence, easy to keep it. Stubborn and steadfast! Pressure they will bear; oppression never.

ALBA (*who meanwhile has turned his head several times*). Would you repeat all that in the presence of the King?

EGMONT. All the worse, if his presence made me afraid! All the better for him, for his people if he inspired me with courage, gave me confidence to say a great deal more!

ALBA. If what you have to say is useful, I can listen to it as well as he can.



EGMONT. I should say to him: the shepherd can easily drive a whole herd of sheep along, the ox draws its plough without resisting. But if you wish to ride a thoroughbred horse, you must learn to read its thoughts, you must demand nothing foolish nor demand it foolishly. That is why the citizens wish to retain their old constitution, to be ruled by their compatriots, for they know how they will be led and can expect these leaders to be both disinterested and concerned with the people's fate.

ALBA. But shouldn't the Regent be empowered to change these old traditions? And could not this be the most precious of his privileges? What is permanent in this world? And should one expect a political institution to be permanent? Must not the circumstances change in time, and, for that very reason, must not an old constitution become the cause of a thousand evils, because it takes no account of the present state of the people? I fear that these old rights are so acceptable because they offer dark recesses in which the cunning and the mighty can hide and hold out at the people's cost, at the expense of the whole.

EGMONT. And these arbitrary changes, these unrestricted interferences on the part of the highest authority, do they not forebode that one desires to do what thousands must not do? He desires to liberate himself alone, so that he may gratify every whim, translate every thought into action. And if we were to put all our trust in him, a good wise King, can he speak for his successors? Can he assure us that none will rule without mercy and consideration? Who then would save us from absolute despotism, when he sends us his servants and minions to rule and dispose as they please, without knowledge of our country or of its needs, meet no resistance, and feel free of all responsibility?

ALBA (*who has looked behind him again*). Nothing is more natural than that a King should seek to rule by his own means and prefer to entrust his orders to those who understand him best, endeavour to understand him, and obey his will unconditionally.

EGMONT. And it is just as natural that the citizen should wish to be ruled by those who were born and bred where he was, who were imbued with the same ideas of right and wrong, whom he can look upon as brothers.

ALBA. And yet the aristocracy can hardly be said to have shared equally with these brothers?

EGMONT. This occurred centuries ago and is now accepted without envy. But if new men were sent to us gratuitously to enrich themselves once more at the nation's expense, if the people knew themselves to be at the mercy of a severe, bold, and unlimited avarice, it would cause a ferment that would not easily

subside into itself.

ALBA. You tell me what I ought not to hear; I too am a foreigner.

EGMONT. My telling it to you shows that I don't mean you.

ALBA. Even so I would rather not hear it from you. The King sent me in the hope that I should receive the support of the nobility. The King *wills* his will. The King, after long reflection, has seen what the people requires; things cannot go on, cannot remain as they were. It is the King's intention to restrict them for their own good, if need be to thrust their own welfare upon them, to sacrifice the harmful citizens so that the best may live in peace and enjoy the blessing of wise government. This is his resolve. To convey it to the nobility is my charge; and what I demand in his name is advice as to how it is to be done, not what is to be done, for this he has decided.

EGMONT. Unfortunately your words justify the people's apprehension, the general apprehension. For he has decided what no prince has the right to decide. His will is to weaken, oppress, destroy the strength of his people—their self-confidence, their own conception of themselves—so as to be able to rule them without effort. His will is to corrupt the very core of their individuality; doubtless with the intention to make them happier. His will is to annihilate them so that they will become something, a different something. Oh, if his intention is good, it is being misguided. It is not the King whom this people resists; what it opposes is only the King who is taking the first unfortunate steps in a direction utterly wrong.

ALBA. In your state of mind it seems useless for us to try to come to an understanding. You belittle the King and hold his advisers in contempt if you doubt that all this has already been considered, investigated, and weighed up. It is not my business to go into every *pro* and *contra* once more. Obedience is what I ask of the people—and of you, the foremost and greatest, I ask counsel and action as pledges for this absolute duty.

EGMONT. Demand our heads and have done with it! Whether his neck will bend under this yoke or bow to the axe is all one to a noble soul. It was in vain that I spoke at such length. I have shaken the air, and gained nothing more.

*Enter Ferdinand.*

FERDINAND. Forgive me for interrupting your conversation. The bearer of this letter requires an urgent reply.

ALBA. Excuse me while I see what it contains.



*Steps aside.*

FERDINAND, *to* EGMONT. That's a fine horse your men have brought to fetch you.

EGMONT. It's not the worst. I've had it for a while; I'm thinking of parting with it. If you like it, perhaps we can come to terms.

FERDINAND. Good. Let's discuss the matter.

*Alba motions to his son, who withdraws to the back.*

EGMONT. Good-bye. Dismiss me now, for, by God, I can think of nothing more to say.

ALBA. A happy chance has prevented you from betraying your thoughts farther. Recklessly you opened the very folds of your heart and have accused yourself much more severely than any opponent could have done in his malice.

EGMONT. The rebuke does not touch me; I know myself well enough, and am aware how devoted I am to the King—much more than many who serve their own interests in his service. It is with reluctance that I leave this quarrel without seeing it resolved, and only wish that our service of one master, the welfare of a country, will soon unite us. Perhaps a second conference and the presence of the other princes, who are absent today, will bring about at some happier moment what today seems impossible. With that hope I leave you.

ALBA (*giving a sign to Ferdinand*). Stop, Egmont! Your sword!

*The middle door opens; one catches a glimpse of the gallery occupied by guards, who remain immobile.*

EGMONT (*after a brief, astonished silence*). So that was your purpose! It was for that you called me?

*Clutching his sword, as if to defend himself.*

Did you think I'm defenceless?

ALBA. It is the King's order; you are my prisoner.

*At the same moment armed men enter from both sides.*

EGMONT (*after a silence*). The King? Oh, Orange, Orange!

*After a pause, handing over his sword.*

Well, take it, then. It has served me more often to defend the King's cause than to protect this body.

*Exit through the middle door. The armed men follow him out; also Alba's son.  
Alba remains standing.*

## ACT V

*Street at Dusk Clare.  
Brackenburg. Citizens.*

BRACKENBURG. Darling. For heaven's sake! What are you doing?

CLARE. Come with me, Brackenburg. You can't know much about people or you wouldn't doubt that we shall free him. For don't they love him dearly? I swear that every one of them is filled with a burning desire to save him, to avert this danger from a precious life and give back freedom to the most free of all. Come on! All that's lacking is a voice to call them together. They haven't forgotten what they owe to him and they know that it's his mighty arm alone that protects them from disaster. On his account and their own they must stake all they have. And what is it we stake? Our lives, at the most, and those are not worth preserving if he dies.

BRACKENBURG. Poor, foolish girl! You don't see the power that fetters us hopelessly!

CLARE. They don't seem unbreakable to me. But let's not waste time on idle words! Here come some of those honest, brave fellows of the old sort. Listen, friends. Listen, neighbours.... Tell me, what news of Egmont?

CARPENTER. What does the child want? Tell her to be quiet.

CLARE. Come closer, so that we can talk softly till we're in agreement, and stronger. We haven't a moment to lose. The insolent tyranny that dares to put him in chains is drawing its dagger to murder him. Oh, friends, every minute of the gathering dusk makes me more anxious. I fear this night. Come on! Let's divide into small groups and run through every district, calling the citizens out into the street. Each will take his old weapons. We shall meet again in the marketplace, and our stream will sweep everyone along with it. Our enemies will find themselves surrounded and flooded, and will know that they are defeated. How can a handful of slaves resist us? And he, back in our midst, will turn about, know that he's free, and thank us all one day, thank us who were so

deeply in his debt. Perhaps he'll see—no, certainly he'll see—another dawn break in an open sky.

CARPENTER. What's the matter with you, girl?

CLARE. Don't you understand me? I'm speaking of the Count! I'm speaking of Egmont.

JETTER. Don't mention that name. It's deadly.

CLARE. Not that name. What? Not mention his name? Who doesn't mention it at every possible opportunity? Who can escape it anywhere? Often I've read it in these stars, every letter of it. And you ask me not to mention it? What can you mean? Oh, friends, dear good neighbours, you're dreaming, come to your senses. Don't stare at me so blankly and timidly. Nor glance about you in that furtive way! I'm only calling out to you what every one of you wants. Isn't my voice the very voice of your own hearts? Who, in this ominous night, before retiring to a restless bed, would not fall on his knees in earnest prayer imploring Heaven for his safety? Ask one another; let each of you ask himself! And who will not say after me: Egmont's freedom or death!

JETTER. God preserve us! This will end in disaster.

CLARE. Don't go. Stay here instead of cringing from his name, which once you welcomed, happily applauded. When rumour announced him, when the news spread: "Egmont is coming! He is coming back from Ghent!" the inhabitants of those streets through which he must pass thought themselves lucky. And when you heard the clatter of his horses each one threw down his work at once, and over all the careworn faces which you thrust out of the windows there passed a gleam of joy and hope like a ray of sunlight cast by his face. Then you lifted up your children on the threshold and pointed out to them: "Look, that's Count Egmont, the tallest, there! That's Egmont! The one from whom you can expect better times than ever your poor fathers knew!" Don't wait to let your children ask one day: "Where is he gone? Where are the times you promised us?" ... And here we stand chattering! Wasting idle words, betraying him!

SOEST. You should be ashamed of yourself, Brackenburg. Don't let her go on. Stop her before it's too late.

BRACKENBURG. Clare, my dearest, let's go. What will your mother say? It could be ...

CLARE. Do you take me for a child, or a madwoman? What could be? You won't drag me away from this terrible certainty with any hope you can invent. You must listen to me and you shall: for I can see you're deeply troubled and can find no guidance in your own hearts. Just let a single glance pierce through the



present danger, back to the past, the recent past. Or turn your thoughts to the future! Can you live at all, *will* you live if he perishes? With his last breath our freedom too expires. What was he to you? For whose sake did he deliver himself up to the most pressing danger? Only for you his wounds bled and healed. The great spirit that supported you all languishes in a cell, and treacherous murder lurks in the dark corners. Perhaps he is thinking of you, placing his hopes in you, though accustomed only to give and to fulfil.

CARPENTER. Come along; let's be off.

CLARE. And I have no strength, no muscles like yours; but I have what all of you lack—courage and contempt for danger! If only my breath could infuse you with some of it! If only I could lend you human warmth and vigour by pressing you to my breast! Come with me! I shall walk in your midst! Just as a floating banner, in itself defenceless, leads a band of noble warriors on, so, flaring over all your heads, my spirit hovers, and love and courage will weld this wavering, scattered people into a terrible army.

JETTER. Get her away from here! I feel sorry for her.

*Exeunt Citizens.*

BRACKENBURG. Clare, my dear. Can't you see where we are?

CLARE. Yes: under the sky that so often seemed to expand more gloriously when noble Egmont walked under it. It's from these windows they looked out, four or five heads, one above the other. In front of these doors they bowed and scraped when he looked down at the lily-livered wretches. Oh, how I loved them then, because they honoured him. Had he been a tyrant, they would have every right to sneak away from him now. But they loved him! Oh, those hands that could raise hats are too feeble to lift a sword.... Brackenburg, what about us? Can we reproach them? These arms, that so often held him fast, what are they doing for him? Cunning has always succeeded so well in this world. You know the ins and outs, you know the old Palace. Nothing is impossible. But tell me what to do!

BRACKENBURG. What if we went home?

CLARE. A good idea!

BRACKENBURG. There's one of Alba's patrols on that corner; do listen to the voice of reason. Do you think I'm a coward? Don't you think me capable of dying for you? But we're both out of our senses, I no less than you. Can't you see what's impossible? Try to pull yourself together. You're beside yourself.

CLARE. Beside myself? That's disgusting, Brackenburg. It's you who're beside

yourself. When you were loud in your reverence for the hero, called him your friend, your protector, your hope, and cheered him when he appeared—then I stood in my corner of the room, half raised the window, listened, and hid myself, and yet my heart beat faster than the hearts of all your men. And now again it beats faster than all your hearts! You hide yourselves because it's good for you, deny him and don't even feel that you will perish if he dies.

BRACKENBURG. Let's go home.

CLARE. Home?

BRACKENBURG. Only try to think! Look about you. These are the streets where you walked only on Sundays, through which you passed modestly on your way to church, where, with excessive respectability, you were angry with me if I joined you with a friendly word of greeting. Here you stand and talk and act in full view of the public. Only try to think, my dearest. What's the use of it all?

CLARE. Home! Oh yes, I remember. I'm thinking, Brackenburg. Let's go home! Do you know where my home is?

*Exeunt.*

*Prison*

*Lighted by a lamp, a bunk in the background. Egmont, alone.*

EGMONT. Old friend, ever-faithful sleep, do you forsake me too, like my other friends? How willingly once you descended upon my free head and, like a lovely myrtle wreath of love, cooled my temples. In the midst of battle, on the wave of love, lightly breathing I rested in your arms like a burgeoning boy. When gales roared through trees and foliage, branch and crest creaked as they bent, yet deep within the heart's core remained unmoving. What is it that shakes you now? What is it that shivers your steadfast loyal will? I feel it, it is the sound of the murderous axe that nibbles at my root. Still I stand fast and upright, but an inward shudder runs through me. Yes, treacherous power prevails, it is stronger than I. It undermines the high, solid trunk; before the bark has withered, roaring and shattering, the crest will fall.

Why, now, you that so often blew away mighty cares from your head like soap-bubbles, why now can you not drive off the thousand-limbed forebodings that stir within your heart? Since when has Death assumed a fearful appearance for you, who once lived calmly with this changing image as with all the other shapes of the familiar world? But then, it is not he, the swift enemy, whom the healthy man longs to meet in close combat; the prison cell it is, prefiguring the

grave, repulsive to the hero and the coward alike. I found it insufferable enough to sit on my padded chair when in solemn council the princes endlessly and repetitively debated what could have been decided in a moment, and when between the gloomy walls of a great hall the beams of the ceiling seemed to throttle me! Then I would hurry out as soon as possible and leap upon my horse's back with a deep breath! Then quickly out where we belong! Out to the fields, where from the earth all Nature's most immediate remedies, vaporous, rise, and through the heavens, wafting all the blessings of the planets, enwrapping us, descend upon our heads; where, like the earthborn giant, strengthened by our mother's touch, we rise to our full height; where we feel wholly human, one with all that's human, human desire pulsing through every vein; where the urge to press forward, to be victorious, to seize, to use one's fists, to possess, to conquer glows in the young huntsman's soul; where the soldier is quick to arrogate to himself his inborn claim to all the world and in his terrible freedom rages like a hailstorm through meadow, field, and forest, wreaking destruction, and knows no bounds that human hands have set. A mere phantasm, this, this dream of remembered bliss that so long was mine. What has treacherous Fortune done with it? Does Fortune now refuse to grant you that quick death you never shunned in the full glare of the sun, to offer you instead a foretaste of the grave in nauseous mustiness? How vilely now it breathes upon me from these stones! Already life congeals; and from my bed, as from the grave, my foot recoils.

O Care, you that begin your murderous work before the event, leave off! Since when has Egmont been alone, utterly alone in this world? It's doubt that makes you helpless now, not Fortune. Has the King's justice, in which you trusted all your life, has the Regent's friendship which—why not admit it now?—was almost love, have these vanished like a shining, fiery mirage of the night? And do they leave you lonely now, plunged into darkness, on a dangerous track? Will not Orange venture out scheming at the head of your assembled friends? Will not a crowd collect and, with growing force, go out to rescue an old friend?

O walls that now enclose me, do not halt the kindly progress of so many spirits. And that courage which once poured out of my eyes into theirs, let it now flow back from their hearts into mine. Oh yes, they stir in their thousands, they are coming, to stand by me now. Their pious wishes wing their way to Heaven and beg for a miracle. And if no angel comes to my aid from above, I see them take up their swords and lances. The gates split in two, the bars burst asunder, the wall comes crashing down with their impact, and gladly Egmont



steps out towards the freedom of approaching day. How many familiar faces receive me jubilantly. Oh, Clare, if you were a man, I should surely see you here, the very first to welcome me, and I should owe you what it is hard to owe to a King, freedom.

*Clare's House*

*Clare comes out of her bedroom with a lamp and a glass of water. She sets down the glass on the table and goes to the window.*

CLARE. Brackenburg? Is that you? What was that noise? No one yet? It was no one. I shall put the lamp on the window-sill so that he can see that I'm still awake, that I'm still waiting for him. He promised to bring me news. News? No, horrible certainty. Egmont condemned! What court of law has the right to summon him? And yet they condemn him. Does the King condemn him, or the Duke? And the Regent washes her hands of it. Orange dilly-dallies, and all his friends.... Is this the world of whose inconstancy and unreliability I have heard much, but experienced nothing? Is this the world? Who would be so wicked as to be an enemy to him? Could malice be powerful enough to cause the sudden downfall of one so generally loved and esteemed? And yet it *is* so. It is.... Oh, Egmont, both from God and men I thought you safe as in my arms! What was I to you? You called me yours, and I was truly yours, wholly devoted and dedicated to you.... What am I now? In vain I stretch out my arms towards the noose that grips you. You helpless, and I free! Here is the key to my door. My coming and going depend on my own free will, and yet I am nothing to you. Oh, fetter me to keep me from despair! And cast me down into the deepest dungeon to beat my head against damp walls, to whimper for freedom, dream of how I would help him if I weren't fettered and chained—how I should help him then! But now I'm free, and in that freedom lies the fear of impotence. Fully conscious, yet incapable of moving a finger to help him. Oh, even the smaller part of you, your Clare, is a prisoner as you are and, separated from you, wastes her last strength in a deathly convulsion.... I hear someone creeping in—a cough, Brackenburg—yes, he's come. Poor, honest Brackenburg, your fate is always the same. Your sweetheart opens the door to you at night, but oh, for how unhappy, ill-omened a meeting!

*Enter Brackenburg.*

CLARE. You look so pale and harassed, Brackenburg. What is it?

BRACKENBURG. I've passed through dangers and detours to see you. All the main streets are guarded. I stole my way to you through alleys and dark nooks.

CLARE. Tell me what's happening.

BRACKENBURG (*taking a seat*). Oh, Clare, I feel like weeping. I had no love for him. He was the rich man who lured away the poor man's only sheep to a better pasture. I've never cursed him. God made me loyal and softhearted. But all my life dissolved in pain and flowed out of me, and my daily hope was that I should languish away.

CLARE. Forget it, Brackenburg! Forget yourself. Tell me about him. Is it true? He's been condemned?

BRACKENBURG. He has. I know it beyond doubt.

CLARE. And he's still alive?

BRACKENBURG. Yes, he's still alive.

CLARE. How can you be sure about it? Tyranny murders the glorious man overnight. His blood flows where no one can see him. The people lies drugged in anxious sleep and dreams of rescue, dreams the fulfilment of its impotent wish. Meanwhile, dissatisfied with us, his soul forsakes this world. He's gone! Don't deceive me. Don't deceive yourself.

BRACKENBURG. No, he's alive, I assure you.... But the Spaniard is preparing a terrible spectacle for the people whom he wants to tread underfoot violently and forever; he will crush every heart that stirs for freedom.

CLARE. Carry on and calmly pronounce my death sentence also. Already I am walking closer and closer to the fields of the blessed and can feel the comfort wafted over from those regions of everlasting peace. Tell me all.

BRACKENBURG. I could tell by the patrol and gather from stray remarks that something gruesome is being prepared in secret in the market-place. Through byways, through familiar passages, I crept to my cousin's house and looked down on the market-place from a back window. Torches flickered in a wide circle of Spanish soldiers. I strained my eyes, unaccustomed to such sights, and out of the night a black scaffold loomed up at me, spacious and high. I felt faint with horror. A great many men were busy around it, draping black cloth around any of the woodwork that was still white and visible. Last of all they covered the steps as well; I saw them do it. They seemed to be dedicating the site for an abominable sacrifice. A white crucifix, which shone in the night like silver, had been erected high up on one side. I looked on and grew more and more certain of the terrible certainty. Still torches swayed about here and there; gradually

they vanished or went out. All at once this monstrous progeny of the night had returned to its mother's womb.

CLARE. Quiet, Brackenburg. Be silent now. Let this veil cover my soul. The spectres are gone, and you, lovely night, lend your cloak to the earth that's in ferment inwardly; no longer Earth will bear her loath-some burden but opens her deep jaws and, grating, swallows down the murderous scaffold. And surely an angel will be sent by that God whom they have blasphemously made a witness to their fury; bolts and fetters will break at the messenger's holy touch, and he will surround our friend with a mild radiance; gently and silently he'll lead him through the night to freedom. And my way too leads through that darkness secretly, and I go to meet him.

BRACKENBURG (*detaining her*). Where, child, where? What are you going to do?

CLARE. Quiet, my dear, so that no one will wake up; so that we shan't wake ourselves. Do you know this little bottle, Brackenburg? I took it away from you for a joke, when you used to threaten suicide in your impatience.... And now, my friend——?

BRACKENBURG. By all the saints!

CLARE. You won't prevent it. Death is my part. And don't begrudge me this quick, gentle death, which for yourself you held in readiness. Give me your hand! At the very moment when I open the dark door which permits no going back, I could tell you by the pressure of this hand how much I loved you and how much I pitied you. My brother died young, it was you I chose to take his place. Your heart protested, tormented itself and me—more and more hotly you demanded what was not meant for you. Forgive me, and farewell. Let me call you brother; it is a name in which a host of other names are contained. And faithfully treasure my last parting gift—accept this kiss. Death unites all things, Brackenburg, and it unites us too.

BRACKENBURG. Then let me die with you. Share it with me, share it! There is enough of it to put out two lives.

CLARE. No, you shall live, you can live. Help my mother, who but for you would die of poverty. Be to her what I can no longer be; live together and weep for me. Weep for your country and for him who alone could have preserved it. The present generation will not recover from this shame, even the fury of revenge will not blot it out. Poor people, drag out your lives through this age that is no age at all. Today the world comes to a sudden stop; its turning ceases, and my pulse will beat but a few minutes longer. Farewell.

BRACKENBURG. Oh, live with us, as we for you alone! You murder us in you. Oh,



live and suffer! Inseparable we shall support you at either side, and always considerate, love shall grant you the utmost comfort, two living arms. Be ours, because I may not say, be mine.

CLARE. Quiet, Brackenburg, you're not aware how you touch me. What is hope to you is despair to me.

BRACKENBURG. Share that hope with the living. Stay on the brink of the abyss; glance down it once and look back at us.

CLARE. I have conquered; don't call me back into the battle.

BRACKENBURG. You're in a daze; wrapped up in night you seek the depth. But even now not every light is out, still many a day will dawn.

CLARE. Woe to you, woe! Cruelly you tear up the curtain before my eyes. Yes, that day will break! In vain pull all the mists about itself and break against its will. Anxiously the citizen will look out of his window, the night leave behind a black stain; he looks, and, horribly, the murderous scaffold grows in daylight. In renewed anguish the profaned image of Christ will raise an imploring eye to the Father above. The sun will not dare to shine, refusing to mark the hour at which he is to die. Wearily the hands of the clock move on their way, one hour after another strikes. Stop! Now it is time! The premonition of morning drives me to my grave.

*She goes to the window as if to look out and secretly drinks.*

BRACKENBURG. Clare! Clare!

CLARE (*goes to the table and drinks the water*). Here is the rest. I do not ask you to follow. Do what you may, farewell. Put out this lamp quietly and without delay. I am going to lie down. Creep away softly, close the door behind you. Quietly! Don't wake my mother. Go, save yourself! Save yourself! If you don't want to be taken for my murderer.

*Exit.*

BRACKENBURG. She leaves me, as usual, for the last time. Oh, if a human soul could know its power to rend a loving heart! She leaves me standing here, left by myself, and death and life are equally loathsome to me now. To die alone! Weep, you lovers, there is no harder fate than mine. She shares the poison with me and dismisses me. Sends me away from her! She drags me after her and pushes me back into life. Oh, Egmont, what a praiseworthy lot is yours! She is the first to set out, you'll take the wreath of victory from her hand; bringing all

heaven with her she meets you on your way.... And shall I follow? To stand aside again? And carry inextinguishable envy into those celestial realms? On earth there is no staying now for me, and hell and heaven offer equal anguish. How welcome the dreadful hand of annihilation would be to this wretch!

*Exit Brackenburg. The stage remains unchanged for a while. Then music, signifying the death of Clare, strikes up; the lamp, which Brackenburg forgot to extinguish, flares up a few times more, then goes out. Soon the scene changes to*

### *Prison*

*Egmont lies sleeping on his berth. There is a rattling of keys, and the door opens. Servants enter with torches, followed by Ferdinand, Alba's son, and Silva, accompanied by armed men. Egmont wakes up with a start.*

EGMONT. Who are you, who so roughly shake away sleep from my eyes? What do your defiant, uncertain glances betoken to me? Why this dreadful procession? What lying nightmare have you come to present to my half-awakened spirit?

SILVA. The Duke sends us to announce your sentence to you.

EGMONT. Have you brought the hangman too to execute it?

SILVA. Listen to it, then you will know what awaits you.

EGMONT. This befits you well and befits your shameful undertaking. Hatched out at night and carried out at night. So this insolent deed of injustice may remain hidden. Step forward boldly, you who keep the sword concealed beneath your cloak. Here is my head, the freest that ever tyranny severed from its socket.

SILVA. You are mistaken. What fair judges have resolved they will not conceal from the face of day.

EGMONT. In that case their insolence exceeds all measure and conception.

SILVA (*takes the verdict from one of the attendants, unfolds it, and reads*). "In the name of the King, and by authority of a special power bestowed on us by His Majesty to judge all his subjects, of whatever station, not excluding Knights of the Golden Fleece, after due ..."

EGMONT. Can the King bestow that power?

SILVA. "After due, lawful, and exact examination of the evidence we declare you, Henry, Count Egmont, Prince of Gavre, guilty of High Treason, and pronounce the sentence: that at the first break of day you be led from your cell to the marketplace and that there, in the full view of the people, as a warning to all traitors, you suffer death by the sword. Signed in Brussels on ..."

*Date and year are read out indistinctly, so that audience do not catch them.*

“... by Ferdinand, Duke of Alba, President of the Court of the Twelve.” Now you know your fate; you have little time left to reconcile yourself to it, put your house in order, and take leave of your nearest and dearest.

*Exeunt Silva and attendants. Ferdinand remains with two torch bearers. The stage is dimly lit.*

EGMONT (*has remained standing, deep in thought, and allowed Silva to leave without looking up. He thinks he is alone and as he raises his eyes he sees Alba's son*). You stay behind? Is it your wish to add to my astonishment, my horror, by your presence? Are you perhaps waiting to bring your father the welcome news of my unmanly despair? Go, then! Tell him. Tell him that he deceives neither me nor the world with his lies. At first they will whisper it behind his back, then tell it to him, the ambitious seeker of fame, aloud and more loudly still; and when one day he descends from this peak, thousands of voices will cry it out at him! Not the welfare of the state, not the dignity of the King, not the peace of the Provinces brought him here. For his own sake he counselled war, so that the warrior might prove himself in war! It was he who created this monstrous confusion, so that he would be needed! And I fall as a victim to his vile hatred, his mean jealousy. Yes, I know it and have the right to say it: the dying man, the mortally wounded, may say it. The conceited man envied me; to destroy me was his dear and long-deliberated plan. Even when we were younger and played at dice together, and piles of gold, one after another, speedily moved from his side to mine, he stood there grimly, pretending indifference but inwardly consumed with anger, more at my gain than at his loss. I still recall the glowering gaze, the significant pallor when, at a public festivity, in front of many thousands of people, we competed in a shooting match. He challenged me, and both nations, Spaniards and Netherlanders, stood there betting and wishing. I beat him; his bullet missed, mine hit the mark. A loud cheer broke from my supporters and resounded in the air. Now his shot hits me. Tell him that I know it, that I know him, that the world despises every sign of victory which a petty mind erects for itself by base wiles. As for you, if it is possible for a son to forsake the ways of his father, practise shame in time, by feeling ashamed for him whom you would like to revere with all your heart.

FERDINAND. I listen to you without interrupting. Your reproaches weigh on me like the blows of a club on a helmet. I feel the impact but I am armed. You strike



home but you do not wound me. All I feel is the pain that rends my heart. Woe is me that I should have grown up to look on such a sight, that I was destined to act in such a play!

EGMONT. What am I to make of that lamentation? Why should you be moved or troubled? Is it belated remorse at your part in the shameful conspiracy? You are so young, and your appearance promises well. You were so candid, so friendly towards me. As long as I looked at you, I was reconciled to your father. And just as false, more false than he, you lured me into the snare. You are the hideous one! Whoever trusts *him* does so at his peril; but who would suspect any peril in trusting you? Be off with you. Don't rob me of these last moments! Be off, so that I may collect my thoughts, forget the world, and you before all else! ...

FERDINAND. What can I say to you? I stand and look at you and yet I do not see you nor feel that I am myself. Shall I excuse myself? Shall I assure you that I did not discover my father's intentions till late, till right at the end; that I acted as a passive, inanimate instrument of his will? What can it matter now what you may think of me? You are lost; and I, wretch that I am, only stand here to convince you of it and to bewail you.

EGMONT. What a strange voice, what unexpected comfort to meet on my way to the grave! You, the son of my first, almost my only enemy, you feel sorry for me, you are not on the side of my murderers? Speak up. Tell me! In what light am I to regard you?

FERDINAND. Cruel father! Oh yes, I recognize you in that command. You knew my feelings, my disposition, which so often you rebuked as the inheritance of a tender mother. To mould me in your image you sent me here. To see this man on the edge of his yawning grave, in the grip of a violent death, you compel me; no matter what becomes of me, no matter that I suffer the deepest anguish. If only I become deaf and blind to every kind of plight. If only I become insensitive!

EGMONT. You astonish me! Control yourself! Stand up and speak like a man!

FERDINAND. Oh, that I were a woman! So that one could say to me: what's moving you? What disturbs you so? Tell me of a greater, a more monstrous evil—make me the witness to a more abominable deed. I shall thank you, I shall say: it was nothing.

EGMONT. You forget yourself. Remember where you are!

FERDINAND. Let this passion rage, let me lament unrestrained! I have no wish to appear firm, when all is collapsing inside me. To think that I must see you here! You of all men! Oh, it's horrible. You don't understand me. And should you

understand me? ... Egmont! Egmont!

EGMONT. Solve me this riddle!

FERDINAND. No riddle.

EGMONT. How can you be so deeply moved by the fate of a stranger?

FERDINAND. No stranger. You're no stranger to me. It was your name that in my first youth shone to me like a star of heaven. How often I listened to tales about you, asked about you! The child's hope is the youth, the youth's hope the man. That is how you strode in front of me, always ahead of me, and always unenvious I saw you in front and followed you, step by step. Then at last I hoped to see you and did see you, and my heart went out to you. You I had chosen for myself, and confirmed my choice when I saw you. Now, only now, I hoped to be with you, to live with you, to grasp you, to—Well, all that has been cut off now, and I see you here.

EGMONT. My friend, if it is of any help to you, accept my assurance that from the first moment I felt drawn to you. And listen to me. Let's exchange a few calm words. Tell me: is it the strict, serious intention of your father to kill me?

FERDINAND. It is.

EGMONT. This sentence, then, is not an idle show devised to frighten me, to punish me by fear and threats, to humiliate me, only to raise me up again by royal grace?

FERDINAND. No, alas, it is not. At first I consoled myself with this remote hope: and already then I felt pained and troubled to see you in this state. Now it is real, definite. No, I shall not control myself. Who will help me, advise me, how to escape the inevitable?

EGMONT. Then listen to me! If you are possessed by such a mighty urge to save me, if you abhor the superior strength of those who keep me fettered, save me then. Every moment is precious. You are the son of the all-powerful and powerful enough yourself.... Let us escape! I know the ways; the means cannot be unknown to you. Only these walls, only a few miles divide me from my friends. Loosen these fetters, take me to them, and be one of us. You can be sure the King will thank you one day for rescuing me. At present he is surprised, and perhaps he hasn't been informed of anything. Your father dares and decides; and His Majesty must approve what has been done, even if he is horrified by it. You are thinking? Oh, think out my way to freedom! Speak, and feed the last hope of my living soul!

FERDINAND. No more, I beg you. Every word you speak adds to my despair. There is no way out, no help, no refuge.... This torments me, it lacerates my heart. I

myself helped to pull the net tight; I know how strongly and tightly it is knitted; I know how the way has been barred to every bold or ingenious resort. I feel that I share your fetters and those of all the others. Should I be lamenting now if I hadn't tried everything? I have lain at his feet, argued and implored. He sent me here to destroy in one moment all the joy and zest that still remained in me.

EGMONT. And there's no escape?

FERDINAND. None.

EGMONT (*stamping his foot*). No escape! Sweet life, dear lovely habit of living and of being active! I must part from you! And so indifferently too! Not in the tumult of battle, in the uproar of arms, in the scattering of a teeming crowd, do you grant me a brief farewell; you take no brusque leave of me, do not shorten the moment of parting. I am to seize your hand, look into your eyes once more, feel your beauty and worth intensely, poignantly as never before, then resolutely tear myself away and say: Good-bye!

FERDINAND. And I am to stand beside you, looking on, unable to hold or hinder you. Oh, what voice would suffice for this complaint? What heart would not break its bonds at this misery!

EGMONT. Calm yourself!

FERDINAND. You can be calm, you can renounce and take this difficult step like a hero, since Necessity holds you by the hand. What can I do? What should I do? You conquer yourself and us; you have come through. As for me, I survive both you and myself. In the banquet's merriment I shall have lost my light, in the tumult of battle my banner. Dreary, confused, and flat the future seems to me.

EGMONT. Young friend, whom by a strange twist of fortune I win and lose at the same time, who feel my death agony, suffer it on my behalf, look at me now; you do not lose me. If my life to you was a mirror in which you liked to contemplate yourself, let my death be the same. Men are not together only when they meet; even the most distant, the departed lives in us. I live for you and have lived long enough for myself. Every day of my life I was glad to be alive, every day of my life I did my duty with quick efficiency, as my conscience demanded. Now life comes to its end, as it could have done sooner, much sooner, even on the sands of Gravelingen. I cease to live; but at least I *have* lived. Now live as I did, my friend, gladly and with zest, and do not shun death!

FERDINAND. You might have preserved yourself for our sake; you should have done. You killed yourself. Often I've heard people talk about you—wise men, both hostile to you and well-disposed, and heard them debate your worth at great length. But in the end they agreed, no one dared to deny, everyone



admitted: yes, he treads a dangerous path. How often I wished I could warn you!  
Did you have no friends, then?

EGMONT. I was warned.

FERDINAND. And, point by point, I found all these accusations set down once more in the present charge—and your replies! Good enough to excuse you; not pertinent enough to exculpate you——

EGMONT. That is as it may be. Men think that they direct their lives and are in control of themselves; yet their inmost selves are irresistibly pulled towards their destinies. Let's not reflect on it; I can easily rid myself of such thoughts—but not of my concern for this country. Yet even this will be taken care of. If my blood can flow for many and buy peace for my people, it flows willingly. I fear it won't be so. But men should cease to fret where they may no longer act. If you can limit or divert your father's nefarious power, do so! Who will be able to do it? ... Farewell.

FERDINAND. I can't go.

EGMONT. I heartily commend my servants to you. I have good men and women in my service; see that they are not dispersed or made unhappy! What's become of Richard, my secretary?

FERDINAND. He preceded you. They beheaded him as your abettor in High Treason.

EGMONT. Poor soul! ... One thing more, and then good-bye. My strength is exhausted. Whatever may preoccupy our minds, in the end Nature exacts her dues and that most insistently; and as a child entwined by a snake enjoys refreshing sleep, so the tired man lies down once more on the very threshold of death and deeply rests, as if a long day's journey lay ahead of him.... And one thing more—I know a girl; you will not despise her, since she was mine. Now that I have entrusted her to your care, I die at peace. You are a noble-minded man; a woman who finds such a man is safe from harm. Is my old William alive? Is he at liberty?

FERDINAND. The vigorous old man who always rides out with you?

EGMONT. That's the one.

FERDINAND. He's alive and at liberty.

EGMONT. He knows where she lives; let him take you there and pay him to the end of his days for showing you the way to that treasure. Farewell!

FERDINAND. I am not going.

EGMONT (*pushing him to the door*). Farewell!

FERDINAND. Oh, let me stay!

EGMONT. No leave-taking, friend.

*He escorts Ferdinand to the door and tears himself away from him there.  
Ferdinand, in a daze, hurries away.*

EGMONT (*alone*). Malevolent man! You never thought to render me this favour through your son. Through him I have been relieved of my cares and pain, of fear and every anxious feeling. Gently, yet urgently, Nature demands her last tribute. All is resolved; and all concluded. And that which in the previous night kept me awake on my uncertain bed now lulls my senses with unalterable certainty.

*He sits down on his berth. Music.*

Sweet sleep! Like purest happiness most willingly you come unbidden, unimplored! You loosen every knot of strenuous thought, consuming all the images of joy and pain; unobstructed flows the circle of inner harmonies and swathed in agreeable delirium, we sink and cease to be.

*He falls asleep; the music accompanies his sleep. Behind his bed the wall seems to open, a radiant apparition enters. Liberty in heavenly raiment, shining, rests upon a cloud. She has Clare's features and bows down towards the sleeping hero. She expresses a feeling of compassion, she seems to commiserate with him. Soon she calms herself and, with an enlivening gesture, shows him the quiver of arrows, then her staff and helmet. She invites him to be of good cheer and, by indicating to him that his death will win freedom for the Provinces, acclaims him victor and hands him a laurel wreath. As she approaches his head with the wreath, Egmont moves, like one stirring in his sleep, so that he comes to lie with his face turned up to her. She holds the wreath suspended over his head; from the distance one hears the warlike music of drums and fifes. At the first, soft sound of this the apparition vanishes. The music grows louder. Egmont awakes; the prison is dimly lit by the dawn. His first movement is to put his hand to his head: he rises and looks about, keeping his hand on his head.*

Gone is the wreath! Beautiful image, the light of day has driven you away! But it was they! Truly it was, combined, the two most treasured comforts of my heart. Divine Liberty, borrowing my beloved's features and shape; the sweet girl dressed in the heavenly raiment of her friend. In one solemn moment they

appear united, more solemn than charming. With blood-stained soles she came before me, the billowing folds of her garment stained with blood. My blood it was, and that of many noble men. No, it was not shed in vain. Press on, brave people! The goddess of Victory leads you. And as the sea bursts through the dykes you build, so you shall burst and tumble down the mound of tyranny and, flooding all, wash it away from the dear site it has usurped.

*Drumbeats come nearer.*

Listen! Listen! How often this sound called me to stride freely towards the field of battle and victory! How blithely the companions trod that dangerous, honourable course! I too go from this cell to meet an honourable death; I die for freedom, for which I lived and fought and for which I now passively offer up myself.

*The background is filled with a line of Spanish soldiers, carrying halberds.*

Yes, go on and summon them! Close your ranks, you won't frighten me. I am accustomed to stand in front of spears, facing spears, and surrounded on all sides by the threat of death, to feel brave life flow through me with redoubled speed.

*Drumbeats.*

The enemy encircles you! His swords are flashing! Courage, friends, more courage! Behind you parents, wives, and children wait!

*Pointing at the guards.*

And these, the ruler's hollow words impel, not their true feelings. Protect your property! And to preserve your dearest ones, willingly, gladly fall as my example shows you.

*Drumbeats. As he walks towards the guards, towards the back exit, the curtain falls; the music strikes up and concludes in a victorious strain.*